BEM

NO 26

THE COMICS
NEWS FANZINE

45p

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consulting editor: Mike Cruden

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

To subscribe to this magazine, please send your name and address, plus a cheque or postal order for £3.00 (for seven issues) made payable to *Martin Lock*, to M. Lock, 3, Marlow Court, Britannia Square, Worcester, WR1 3DP. Please indicate which issue of Bem you wish to start your subscription with. Subscribers also receive copies of the monthly adzine FANTASY TRADER published at the same time as Bem; to receive the issues of FT published between Bems, contact Gez Kelly, 34 Heworth Hall Drive, York YO3 0AQ.

NEW READERS START HERE ...

Contributors, including people whose letters are printed in Reaction, are sent a complimentary copy of the issue of Bem their work is in – or if they have a subscription, it is extended by one issue. Please therefore enclose your full address with any letter – if you want a personal reply, remember to enclose return postage. All letters will be considered for publication, including full addresses, unless you indicate otherwise. Comments in Reaction identified in "/( )/" are by Mike Cruden, unless otherwise indicated. Letters, enquiries, contributions, art, magazines for review, ads, etc should be sent to Martin Lock. The number in the bottom left corner of subscribers' envelopes indicates the final issue each subscriber is paid up for.

ADVERTISING RATES

Full page: £10 ("same size")
Half page: £5.50 (from 10½" by 7½")
Back cover: £22 (with 2 extra colours)
Other rates by request

BEM BACK ISSUES

We still have copies of Bem-12, Bems 15 to 19, the "Captain Frog" comic issued with Bem-20, and Bems 21 to 25: copies up to Bem-24 are available for 30p each by post, while Bem-25 costs 45p. All 12 magazines, with 280 pages, can be yours for £2.80--or, if you're also subscribing to Bem, £5.50 will pay for them plus the next 7 issues.

NEWS AT BEM

The switch to typesetting must stay incomplete for the moment; with the large amount of text in a Bem, the cost would be just too great, and the time saved seems less than expected. However, there's a long, substantial Reaction in typeset this time, packing in what would be at least a dozen pages worth of typewritten text (like this) --and, to my surprise, just look how many pages we've got this time!

The last of the interim typesetting, as used for parts of Bem-25, appears on one page this time, in its reduced size. It features the latest instalment of Howard P. Siegel's column, "Made In America", and a short article on Spider-Man which was printed originally in the American fanzine RBCC, and is reprinted here at the suggestion of its editor & publisher, James Van Hise (and is, therefore, copyright (c) 1979 by James Van Hise, and reprinted with permission) --see his letter in Bem #24 for details!

As promised, part two of the H.M.S. CONQUEROR serial is on board this time; you will remember that, last issue, our heroes drove into a tunnel on a strange planet, only to have the mouth of the tunnel close behind them. But all is not lost -- so seek out page 27, and read on! Part three of the story is already in the files for Bem-27, while Dave Harwood should even now be working on the 5-page conclusion. After that--well, the future of Frank, Lieutenant Fl'ff, and Captain Russell is up to you! It would be good to fit in a few more short strips in Bem's new expanded page-count; already on hand are some interesting strips by Steve Gibson, Martin Longley (the start of a mysterious new Ultra-Man serial), J.H. Szostek, Kev F. Sutherland, Nick Neocleous, and Mark Casto -- none over two pages long.

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With the passing of Comic Media News from the fanzine scene, a large gap is left in the fanzine scene. I have no intention of changing Bem into any sort of counterfeit CMNI, but Bem will take on some of the parts of CMNI that I personally would not like to see lost. Mal Burns has joined the Bem team already, to cover "Unamerican Activities and Subterranean Happenings"; on the interviews front, Mike Cruden had a long discussion with Paul Levitz at the Comicon this year, which will appear as soon as it has been transcribed and approved... And our news sources are continuing to increase and improve. Bem is now taking over from CMNI as the "official agent" for news originally published by the American newszine, THE COMIC READER, which means I can say "all items marked TCR are (c) 1979 by Street Enterprises, and are reprinted with permission." I'm glad this trans-Atlantic collaboration will continue --I'd like to thank Mike Tiefenbacher & Jerry Sinkovec for suggesting it, and Richard Burton for okaying it!

This Bem features an appreciation of Jack Katz's excellent alternative comics series, THE FIRST KINGDOM, by Alan Cookson; once I'd got the words from Alan, the next step was to ask Russ Nicholson to provide a cover, plus the illustrations here and on page 9, in the style of Jack Katz. I think Russ has done an excellent job on this, his second Bem cover, and managed to capture Jack Katz's style very well, without of course doing any direct swiping!

And use of that word brings us to Nige Edwards' brief piece on Superswipe, tucked away in the newly expanded review section, which goes by the name of "Bemuscene"; trust Nige to remember this is the 25th issue of Bem in a row to feature his illoes, and to submit a tribute that one can only describe as fitting. He also mentioned his review of CEREBUS is his 49th review for Bem -- so expect some small celebration of the life & hard times of this man of many parts next time...

After the shorter letter column in Bem last time, Reaction is trying to catch up on itself now; left out this time but due to lead off Bem-27's Reaction are letters from Lilian Edwards, Tony Urwin, Ivo Jerry Steyn, & Steve Grimshaw, while of course there's plenty more room for new letters from the rest of you --they should be sent in as soon as possible, as usual, while the deadline for your reviews for Bemuscene is 31st December--not too long before, or they'll be out of date before they see print! There's no "closed shop" for reviewers here, anyone is welcome to join in...

Subscribers will have noticed that FANTASY TRADER is now only being sent out free with Bem and Graphic Sense; since its cover price is now 15p, that's quite a bonus! If you want this to continue, do make full use of FT's ads, and mention that you got FT with Bem. After all this time, it would be a shame for Bem and FT to drift apart.

It is with great dismay and regret that I pass on the news from Howard Stangroom that Christophe Ta-Min, a Bem contributor and deviser of the "News at Bem" title, has died. He was young, and talented -- what can one say without falling back on the old clichés? So, take care, everyone; I don't want obituaries to have to become a regular feature here. I'm sure I speak for us all in offering our sympathy to Christophe's friends and family.

-MARTIN LOCK

comics news

Marvel has restructured the entire editorial department, and reassigned nearly everything as staff changes and resignations have necessitated. The changes include:

Marv Wolfman has left Marvel to work for DC, although he will continue at Marvel until his contract expires at the end of the year. The resignation stemmed from Marvel's desire that he relinquish his writer-editor status and work under the new system that parallels DC's, in which no writer may edit his own work. (Roy Thomas and Archie Goodwin being the exceptions.) His books have been redistributed, as listed below.

Denny O'Neil has left DC to become an editor for Marvel. Since this is in itself a

the BRAVE and the BOLD
40¢ ALL NEW!
NO. 160 MAR.
Starring...
BATMAN SUPERGIRL
TOGETHER AGAIN--THE TEAM YOU DEMANDED!
NO, BATMAN! IF YOU GO ANY CLOSER, COLONEL SULPHUR WILL KILL MY FATHER!

full-time job, Denny will not be writing any strips on a regular basis at this time.

Due to dissatisfaction with their working relationship, Managing Editor Jim Shooter has relieved Richard Marschall of his editing duties on EPIC ILLUSTRATED and the MARVEL SUPER SPECIALs. Marschall will continue to contribute to that magazine and others on a free-lance basis as a Contributing Editor. Archie Goodwin is the new editor for both EPIC and the specials. Lynn Graeme will continue as editor of the rest of the magazine line.

Larry Hama replaces Paul Laikin as editor of CRAZY. We are not sure if this means a different roster of writers and artists.

Jim Salicrup has been made a full editor, while Bob Budiansky has been named his assistant. The new editorial assignments are:

Archie Goodwin (Mark Gruenwald, assistant): STAR WARS, EPIC ILLUSTRATED, MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL.
Al Milgrom (Jo Duffy, assistant): BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, DEFENDERS, DR STRANGE, FANTASTIC FOUR, INCREDIBLE HULK, MICRONAUTS, ROM, SHE-HULK, SHOGUN WARRIORS.
Denny O'Neil (Mark Gruenwald, assistant): AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, DAREDEVIL, GHOST RIDER, MACHINE MAN, MAN-THING, MARVEL TEAM-UP, POWER MAN, SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, SPIDER-WOMAN, WHAT IF?
Jim Salicrup (Bob Budiansky, assistant): AVENGERS, CAPTAIN AMERICA, IRON MAN, MARVEL PREMIERE, MARVEL SPOTLIGHT, MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, MASTER OF KUNG FU, X-MEN.
Roy Thomas (Mark Gruenwald, assistant): CONAN THE BARBARIAN, KING CONAN, THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, THOR.
Lynn Graeme (Ralph Macchio, assistant): HOWARD THE DUCK, THE HULK!, MARVEL PREVIEW, TOMB OF DRACULA.
Larry Hama: CRAZY.
Unassigned: STAR TREK.

Because of Marv Wolfman's exit, his books have been reassigned. TOMB OF DRACULA will be written by Roger McKenzie beginning with #4; Lilith will become the back-up strip.

MACHINE MAN will be written by Tom DeFalco, with Steve Ditko continuing on the art. SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN will be done by the team of Roger Stern as writer and Marie Severin as artist. FANTASTIC FOUR was to be taken over by Archie Goodwin, but since the EPIC switch, someone else will do it. STAR TREK will be taken over by Marty Pasko. This book has yet to be assigned to an editor. AMAZING SPIDER-MAN will be reassigned sometime next year, since Marv intends to finish off his contract by working ahead on this book. He will have done issues at least up to #208. -TCR

Roger Stern, who has left the Marvel editorial staff to go free-lance, now is the new writer on CAPTAIN AMERICA, and should pick up a couple of other books too. John Byrne & Joe Rubinstein are slated to become the regular art team on Cap, though Carmine Infantino may draw a couple of interim issues. Baron Strucker, Batroc and Mr Hyde, Centaur and Whisper are upcoming villains. -TCR/M

Pocket Books are to issue a series of paperbacks reprinting the newspaper Spider-Man strip from its start, in colour & without missing out any days -- the first volume is due in February. Also scheduled is a STAR TREK volume, using the same material as the Super Special, the first three issues of the monthly comic (which debuts with an April cover-date), and a Treasury tabloid edition.

SHE-HULK #2 on will be scripted by Dave Kraft, returning to Marvel. Once the current inventory on WHAT IF? is used up, the format will be changed to two stories per issue, with the lead story featuring Thor, Spider-Man, Hulk, the Avengers, or the FF, sometimes building on the premises already explored; the back half of the book will be a bit more flexible.

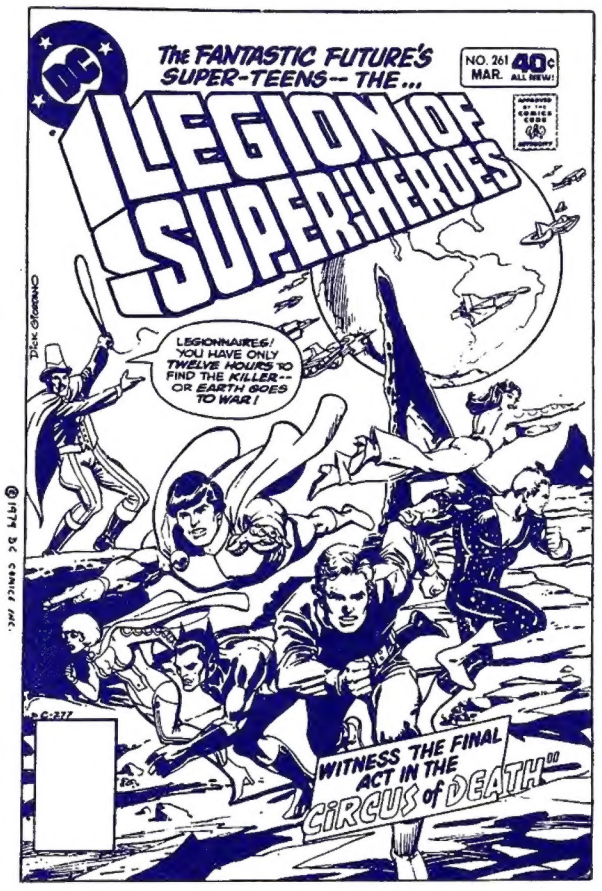
As a bonus to Marvel's regular workers, Marvel will reward anyone --writer, penciller, or inker--who stays on a book for six or more issues. For staying six issues, a bonus of $250 will be paid, on a monthly title; for a further 6, a further $500. After 6 bi-monthly or 4 quarterly issues, the bonus rate is $500 straight off. Allowances will be made for breaks in a run that aren't the fellow's fault; Jim Shooter says "This year has turned out quite well, saleswise, and this programme reflects Marvel's financial stability..." They hope it'll help consistency, deadline-meeting, and general team spirit.

Jack Davis is doing the cover for HOWARD THE DUCK? #3, the Christmas issue, which is drawn by Gene Colan (who's also drawing THE HULK! #19). #4 will feature a parody of PLAYBOY called PLAYDUCK, which includes stories by Bill Mantlo, Mark Gruenwald, Lynn Graeme and Ralph Macchio, and art by John Buscema and Klaus Janson.

Don Perlin and Joe Sinnott will team up to do the artwork for THE DEFENDERS, with Herb Trimpe bowing out. And Marvel's first Marvel Age superhero, Dr Druid (or Dr Droom, as he was then) turns up again in MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE soon, along with Prester John; Stingray, the Scarlet Witch, Hyperion, and Triton are also due for that book soon too, with as villains an all-new Serpent Squad. -TCR/M

After Howie Chaykin's stint, Pat Broderick takes over as regular penciller on THE MICRONAUTS; Mike Golden continues on the book's covers, however.

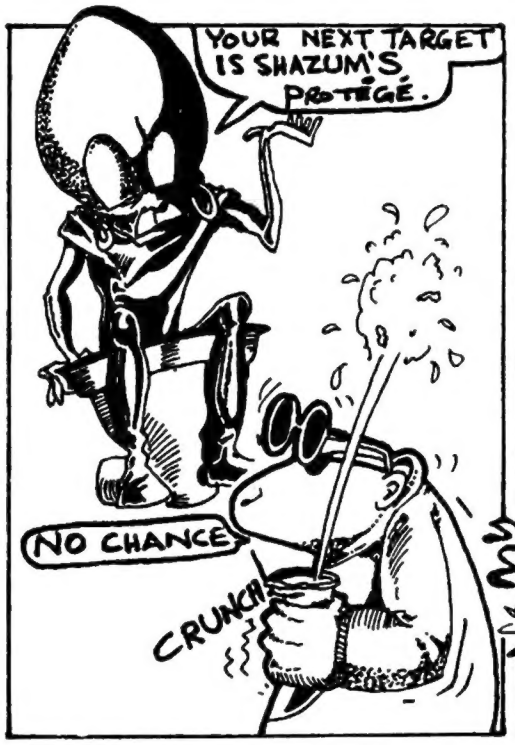
Al Williamson is drawing the MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL adaptation of "The Empire Strikes Back", which will also appear in the monthly.


The FANTASTIC FUTURE'S SUPER-TEENS-- THE...
NO. 261 MAR. 40¢ ALL NEW!
LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES
LEGIONNAIRES! YOU HAVE ONLY TWELVE HOURS TO FIND THE KILLER-- OR EARTH GOES TO WAR!
WITNESS THE FINAL ACT IN THE CIRCUS of DEATH!!!

British distribution at present gives us 13 monthly titles: AVENGERS, SPIDER-WOMAN, DEFENDERS, CAPTAIN AMERICA, SHOGUN WARRIORS, MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, X-MEN, MARVEL TEAM-UP, THOR, IRON MAN, MASTER OF KUNG FU, ROM, and GHOST RIDER. In January, March, etc, MARVEL SPOTLIGHT and DAREDEVIL are the bi-monthlies added to make up the 15; they alternate with MARVEL PREMIERE and MACHINE MAN.

After years of rumours, false starts, near-announcements and disappointments, Stan Lee has finally put together a deal to make a feature film of THE SILVER SURFER. In a 50-50 partnership with Marvel, Lee Kramer of L-K Productions has managed to find half the backing for the film's proposed $25,000,000 budget among British financiers, and expects no trouble in finding the rest. Stan has written the first draft of the film, but extensive revision is expected since the focus of the film will be changed to emphasize special effects and music. The film should begin production next year; as Kramer is Olivia Newton-John's manager, don't be surprised if she is cast as the brunette Shalla Bal.

Dangard Ace is being replaced by another robot in SHOGUN WARRIORS, as his presence caused marketing difficulties in certain countries. Electro is joining the Frightful Four. The Dazzler will appear in SPIDER-MAN #204...now turn the page for the DC news!


YOUR NEXT TARGET IS SHAZUM'S PROTÉGÉ.
NO CHANCE
CRUNCH!

THIS COULD BE YOU.
HEAVENS! THE MICRONOUGHTS.
O.K. I'LL TRY.
HELP!
AAGH!

THUNDERMOLE HURRIES TO STATION WIZZ, WHERE.....
SMACK!
WHY! YOU!

SHAZUM
BOOM

SHAZUM
RIGHT! MOLE!
CLICK

BOOM
HOLEY MOLE!
SHAZUM

BOOM
CLICK!
SHAZUM!
BOOM!
CLICK
SHAZUM
BOOM!

JUST A MINUTE, JUST A MINUTE, I GOT NO THUNDERBOLTS LEFT.
BEST THUNDERBOLTS
SPLUTTER SPLUTTER
HA-HA-HA!
YUK!
BIG RED CHEESE.
TERRY moore.

YEAH! WELL!
I THINK I'D BETTER STAND IN A LESS HAZARDOUS POSITION.

Marv Wolfman officially joins the writing staff at DC in January. He will be writing SUPERMAN with ≠352, GREEN LANTERN with ≠133, and the Superman/Batman feature for WORLD'S FINEST with ≠265. In his 12 years plus of comics writing, Marv has scripted the adventures of almost every major Marvel and DC character; the most exciting thing for him now is, he says, the chance to once again work with his life-long friend, editor Len Wein. The addition of Marv, along with the departure to Marvel of Denny O'Neil, means some changes; Marv is also slated to take up the Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen features in SUPERMAN FAMILY, and alternate issues of both BRAVE & BOLD and DC COMICS PRESENTS, while Gerry Conway picks up the Batman feature in the now monthly dollar DETECTIVE COMICS. And there will be three fill in issues of GREEN LANTERN between O'Neil and Wolfman; they each contain GL 9-pagers, by Rozakis (≠130), Mike W. Barr (≠131), & Paul Kupperberg (≠132); in the back is a 3-part "Tales of the Green Lantern Corps" story by Toomey & Saviuk.

THE UNIMAGINABLE AWAITS YOU IN... THE LAND OF THE SCALED GODS!
40¢ ALL NEW!
NO. 265 MAR.
Wonder Woman
EVEN IF I ARE JANSEN FROM THOSE HORRORS - WE'RE BOTH TRAPPED HERE FOREVER!
ADDED! A BRAND-NEW WONDER GIRL SOLO ADVENTURE!
© 1979 DC COMICS INC.

MEN OF WAR is cancelled with ≠26, cover-dated March -- it was with ≠28 that Len Wein was changing the Gravedigger lead feature into "Gravedigger's Guerrillas". JONAH HEX DIGEST has been discontinued with the third issue, although ≠4 had been advertised. DC SPECIAL BLUE RIBBON DIGEST ≠1, starring The LSH, takes its place on the schedules -- it includes the Legion's first story, and also the first appearances of Universo, the Legion of Substitute Heroes, and the Fatal Five.

SUPERBOY SPECTACULAR ≠1 is in preparation; this Dollar Comic was commissioned by an outside client for distribution through schools. However, DC is also releasing the book to direct sales outlets and collectors' stores; it will not be sold on newsstands. The first story in the book is new, edited by Julius Schwartz, written by E. Nelson Bridwell, and drawn by Curt Swan & Joe Giella. The rest of the book reprints six stories from 1958 to 1961; there are no ads. If the project is successful, more such comics will follow.

The plotting of the second DC/Marvel co-production, again SUPERMAN and SPIDER-MAN, is going on right now; Jim Shooter is doing the scripting. The book is due out in May.

Jim Starlin has returned, and is doing a large number of covers for DC. Among them are UNEXPECTED ≠198, HOUSE OF MYSTERY ≠281, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA ≠177 & 178, WEIRD WAR ≠89, and ADVENTURE COMICS ≠471.

Black Lightning moves to DETECTIVE COMICS with ≠490, scripted by Marty Pasko; Aquaman replaces him in WORLD'S FINEST with ≠262. Hawkman's strip in that issue guest-stars Adam Strange, who appears in his own solo story in ≠263, by Jack C. Harris & Jim Sherman, prepared for the late STAR HUNTERS comic. The Superman/Batman story in ≠262 will be a fill-in by Joe Staton.

Vince Colletta will no longer ink WARLORD! He's swapping assignments with Bob Smith, who has been inking Ramona Fradon's pencils on SUPER FRIENDS. ≠32 of that title is drawn by Kurt Schaffenberger, however.

Upcoming BRAVE AND BOLD team-ups for Batman are Adam Strange (≠161, by Conway & Aparo), Sergeant Rock (≠162, by Bill Kelley & Aparo), Man-Bat (written by Pasko), and BLACK LIGHTNING (written by Paul Kupperberg). Len Wein & Garcia Lopez are working on two issues of DC COMICS PRESENTS; the first brings Deadman in as the Man of Steel's co-star, in a sequel to the Deadman story in the last Dollar-size ADVENTURE; the second issue will feature Superman and Ragman, later in 1980. Batgirl, drawn by Staton & Chiaramonte, is the guest-star in ≠19; Green Arrow is Superman's guest in ≠20, with, again drawn by Joe Staton, Elongated Man in ≠21. Doctor Fate and Captain Comet are also due to drop by the book in the coming year.

J.M. DeMatteis will be scripting a new regular feature for WEIRD WAR TALES. Edited by Len Wein and with art by Pat Broderick, it is entitled "The Creature Commandos"; Len says it is the adventures of Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolfman as they battle during World War II on the side of the Allies. Gulp! After that the news that Bob Kanigher is reviving his "War That Time Forgot" series, featuring GI versus dinosaur confrontations, for the same book is positively anti-climactic...

The origin of the new Starman is to appear in ADVENTURE ≠469-470. J.L. Garcia Lopez is pencilling and inking SUPERMAN ≠347. Mike Fleisher has had his first novel published by St Martin's: "Chasing Harry" is described as "a novel of sexual terror"--I'm sure if you liked his Spectre stories in ADVENTURE a few years back, you'll love this!

DC are licensing its characters to alternative publishers; Roger Slifer's Excalibur Enterprises has two volumes due before Christmas, "Manhunter, the Complete Saga" and "Shade, the Changing Man: The Complete Adventures". Both volumes are black & white, with 8½" x 5½" pages --the former prints the 7 episodes printed in DETECTIVE ≠437-443, plus new material by Archie Goodwin and Walt Simonson, while the latter has the eight published SHADE stories, plus the unpublished ninth issue. 5000 copies of each will be printed. And Mike Friedrich has got the go-ahead to publish an all-new BATMAN graphic novel, by Steve Englehart & Marshall Rogers; DC has script approval only for this, which will probably appear as Star*Reach 20.

Michael Golden and Trevor Von Eeden are each doing stories for TIME WARP. The third issue features work by Ditko, Newton, Mitchell, Kashdan, Giordano, O'Neil, Adkins, Allikas, Barr, Barretto, Edelman, DeMatteis, and Sutton. -TCR

GREEN LANTERN ≠127 will feature a cover by Judge Dredd's own Brian Bolland, portraying a number of alien Green Lanterns. Joe Staton pencilled this issue when he was in the UK, sharing Brian's studio.

DETECTIVE ≠489, the first monthly issue, features two Batman stories. The first is by O'Neil, Don Newton & Dan Adkins; the second by J.M. DeMatteis, Irv Novick and Colletta. The cover story is a Batgirl-Robin team-up by Jack C. Harris, Don Heck and Colletta; an Alfred tale is contributed by Bob Rozakis, José Delbo & Colletta, while Paul Kupperberg, Novick & Steve Mitchell bring us a Commissioner Gordon adventure, and there's room too for an Atom story by Rozakis, Alex Saviuk & Colletta.

HOUSE OF MYSTERY may well be getting a new series soon: "I, Vampire", scripted by J.M. DeMatteis and possibly drawn by Tom Sutton.

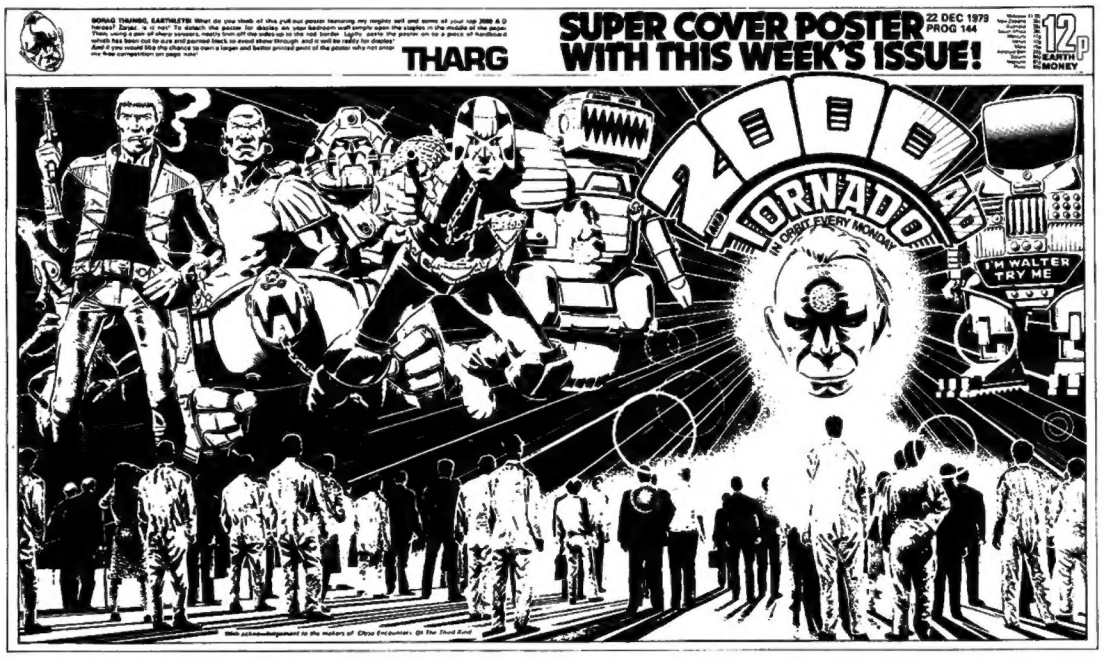
E. Nelson Bridwell, Ramona Fradon & Dave Hunt have completed a 4-volume "Little Library", telling the story of Krypton, Superbaby, Superboy, and Superman.

From Mal Burns, news of his Media & Graphic Productions plans. His work as an artists' agent has reached overload point -- samples of new artwork and manuscripts will always be looked at, but non-returnable photocopies are advised, to Mal at 6-7, Great Newport Street, London WC1.

When problems connected with GRAPHIXUS are ironed out, a final issue will appear; it'll be a gigantic collection of all works in hand. The total creative side of that magazine has now been transferred to the JUNIOR PRINT OUTFIT in Newcastle, with Mal acting as a consultant editor.

Working on a very loose basis with David Noon and Jock Garriock, Mal's activities in the information and research areas will continue when time permits. An update to the COMIX INDEX is being planned right now.

JIM BONAPARTE - DICK! is the title of a multi-media performance due next spring at the Charles Peguy Centre in Leicester Square --and a tie-in "photo-komik" to be published as a special issue of GRAPHIXUS. Another book in the works from Media-Graphic and due for release early next year is on animation. It will feature two festivals at Anesee and Zagreb, a critical study of major animated films, the background story to the animation used in the show, and various interviews, including one with renowned animator, Bob Godfrey. PTO...



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2000 A.D. prog 143 has the first of two Black-Hawk art fill-ins by Ramon Sola, to allow Belardinelli to catch up. This is a very popular strip, currently rated third behind Judge Dredd and the ABC Warriors. The same issue has a film preview of Star Trek by Ro-Jaws (aided by Richard Burton).

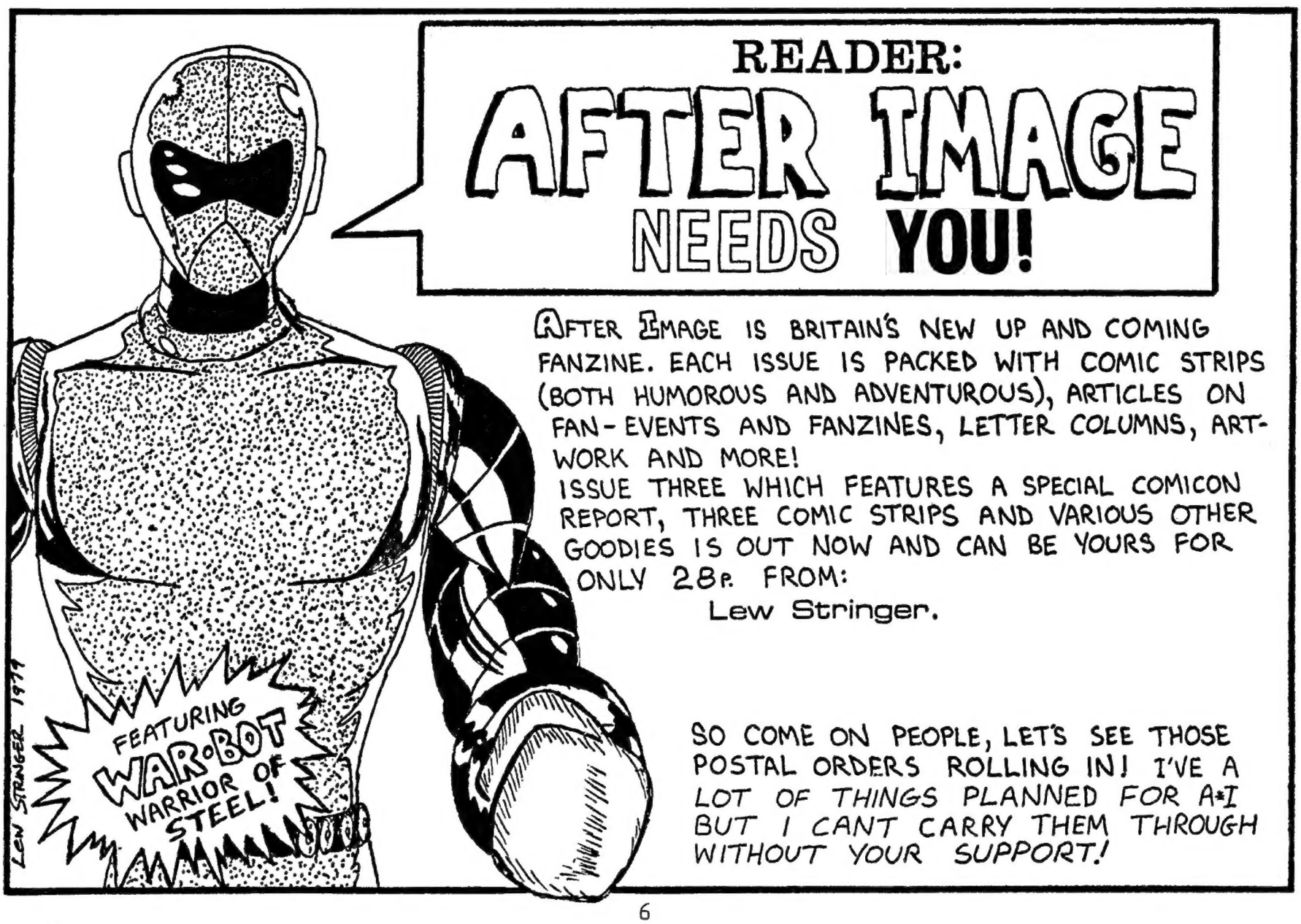
Prog 144 features a 6-page Dredd story drawn by Mike McMahon, as Mike gets his hand in for next year's Annual--for which he's drawing 6, 7 and 16 page Judge Dredd strips, all in colour! They're written by John Howard (alias Wagner, alias Grover). For the first time, that week 2000 A.D. features a wrap-around cover, featuring Tharg and the 2000 A.D. heroes, drawn by Brian Bolland; inside is a chance to win an original-size (½ up) copy of the cover art, signed by Brian and the colourist. There's a special 3-page Ro-Jaws story, written by Pat Mills and drawn by Kev O'Neill, and a 2-page spread of "Design an Alien" submissions. Apparently, that challenge brought a thousand entries in a fortnight flooding into the office!

Prog 145, dated December 29th, is the Christmas issue, with "Tharg's Christmas Tale", written by Alvin Gaunt, who, as mild-mannered Alan Grant, writes Tharg's editorial on page 2 every week; Wolfie Smith ends in that issue, and a 7-part future-graph series by Bill LeFever starts on the back cover, portraying "Warriors of the Future". Tharg stars in a story in prog 146 too, also drawn by Carlos Ezquerra, "Tharg Faces the Dictators of Zrag."

In prog 147, a new 4-part "Timequake" story begins, by Chris Lowder and Jesus Redondo. Cam Kennedy, who drew Storm for Tornado, is sharing the art on "The VCs" with Garry Leach, after the first instalment by Mike McMahon; Garry did the second instalment, then Cam did the next two, and after that they should alternate.

Dinky Toys held a survey of its buying public, to find new ideas for models--and 14% voted for a model of Judge Dredd's motorcycle! Talks on licensing such a model are now in progress. And a Judge Dredd album, similar to the Asterix and Tintin volumes, is due out in the spring, with 60 pages in colour reprinting the robots' revolt story; a new cover by one of Dredd's regular artists will be on it, and the paperback album will cost £1. -ML

ART CREDITS: Mark Casto: 35 (strip); Phil Elliott: 31; Hunt Emerson: 23 (pencils); Jimmy Marshall: 25; Mike Matthews: 13; Angus McKie: 33 (logo); Nick Neocleous: 19; Russ Nicholson: 1, 2, 9; Martin Noone: 11; Luke Rainford: 35 (top); Phil Rushton: 18; Superswipe: 23 (inks), 33 (left).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ISSUE THREE WHICH FEATURES A SPECIAL COMICON REPORT, THREE COMIC STRIPS AND VARIOUS OTHER GOODIES IS OUT NOW AND CAN BE YOURS FOR ONLY 28p. FROM:
Lew Stringer.
FEATURING WAR-BOT WARRIOR OF STEEL!
LEW STRINGER 1979
SO COME ON PEOPLE, LET'S SEE THOSE POSTAL ORDERS ROLLING IN! I'VE A LOT OF THINGS PLANNED FOR A-I BUT I CANT CARRY THEM THROUGH WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT!

Eagle Awards for 1978

434 people voted in the Eagle Awards this year--and since there wasn't time for a preliminary ballot to narrow the contestants down to five per category, they voted for lots of different comics, characters and creators. I mean, 113 different covers, each one somebody's favourite? 99 different favourite single stories? And the thought that there are 37 different artists, 32 writers, and also 32 inkers out there worth voting for is quite a mind-stretcher...

Nine categories have the same winner as last year; three of those were for the X-Men (comic book, team, & inker), who have the distinction of being the only category winner to top half the total vote, in the favourite comic book group category--they've also increased their tally of awards from 3 to 8 of the 13 categories they, their villains, creators, stories and covers were eligible for--and they were pretty close in another 3 categories. Now fair enough, it's generally a good comic, but if this goes on we might as well hold the Eagle Award ceremony in Chris Claremont's kitchen next year...

The two-stage ballot should return for the 1979 awards; the nominating form will be distributed to subscribers with Bem-27, along with the "Bem Ballot" blank, which is your chance to influence the shape of Bems to come. If you're not a Bem subscriber--well, why not become one? At £3 for seven issues, it works out cheaper than buying Bem in shops!

Favourite Comic Book Artist

JOHN BYRNE	38.71%	(168)
Marshall Rogers	10.14%	(44)
George Perez	5.30%	(23)
Mike Golden = Gene Colan	=3.69%	(16)
Pass	2.53%	(11)
32 others	35.94%	(156)

Favourite Comic Book Writer

CHRIS CLAREMONT	36.17%	(157)
Steve Englehart	7.37%	(32)
Roy Thomas = Steve Gerber	=7.14%	(31)
Doug Moench	6.22%	(27)
Pass	3.92%	(17)
27 others	32.03%	(139)

Favourite Comic Book

THE X-MEN	40.55%	(176)
The Avengers	9.68%	(42)
Detective Comics	5.53%	(24)
Tomb of Dracula	5.07%	(22)
Jonah Hex	2.99%	(13)
Pass	1.38%	(6)
36 others	34.79%	(151)

Favourite Comic Magazine

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN	23.04%	(100)
Marvel Preview	17.28%	(75)
Rampaging Hulk	9.22%	(40)
Heavy Metal	7.83%	(34)
1984	5.96%	(25)
Pass	14.98%	(65)
8 others	18.89%	(82)

Favourite Comic Book Inker

TERRY AUSTIN	39.86%	(173)
Tom Palmer	7.37%	(32)
Bob Layton	5.53%	(24)
Klaus Janson	4.61%	(20)
Joe Sinnott	3.23%	(14)
Pass	11.29%	(49)
27 others	28.11%	(122)

Favourite Comic Book Character

BATMAN	11.29%	(49)
Wolverine	9.45%	(41)
Howard the Duck	6.45%	(28)
Conan	5.76%	(25)
Spider-Man = Dr Strange	=4.15%	(18)
Pass	1.38%	(6)
54 others	57.37%	(249)

Favourite Comic Book Group

THE X-MEN	59.91%	(260)
The Avengers	16.59%	(72)
The Fantastic Four	4.84%	(21)
The Defenders	4.15%	(18)
The Legion of Super-Heroes	2.99%	(13)
Pass	3.69%	(16)
6 others	7.83%	(34)

Favourite Comic Book Villain

MAGNETO	19.35%	(84)
The Joker	13.59%	(59)
Dr Doom	10.83%	(47)
Michael/Enemy/Korvac	6.68%	(29)
Dr Bong = Death-Stalker	=2.53%	(11)
Pass	10.37%	(45)
33 others	34.10%	(148)

Favourite Supporting Character

WOLVERINE	16.13%	(70)
Beast	6.45%	(28)
Vision	4.38%	(19)
Nightcrawler	3.23%	(14)
Beverly Switzler = Hawkeye	=2.99%	(13)
Pass	9.91%	(43)
51 others	53.92%	(234)

Character Most Worthy of Own Feature

SILVER SURFER	12.67%	(55)
Warlock	6.91%	(30)
Jack of Hearts	6.22%	(27)
Killraven	5.30%	(23)
Deathlok	3.92%	(17)
Pass	5.07%	(22)
55 others	59.91%	(260)

Favourite Single Story

X-MEN 111 "Mindgames"	2.99%	(13)
Avengers 178 "The Martyr Perplex"	2.76%	(12)
Superman vs. Muhammad Ali = Avengers 177 "The Hope and the Slaughter"	=2.53%	(11)
X-Men 109 "Home are the Heroes" =		
Pass	19.35%	(84)
94 others	67.28%	(292)

Favourite Continued Story

AVENGERS 167, 168, 170-177 (THE MICHAEL/ENEMY SAGA)	17.74%	(77)
X-Men 111-113 (The X-Men vs. Magneto)	14.28%	(62)
Detective Comics 475 & 476 (Batman vs. The Joker)	10.60%	(46)
Thor 272-278 (the False Ragnarok)	2.99%	(13)
X-Men 114-116 (X-Men in The Savage Land) =		
Captain Marvel 50-62 (The Battle for Titan) =	2.07%	(9)
Pass	21.43%	(93)
42 others	28.80%	(125)

Favourite New Comic Book Title

THE MICRONAUTS	23.50%	(102)
Spider-Woman	14.05%	(61)
DC Comics Presents	6.22%	(27)
1984	5.99%	(26)
Machine Man	5.07%	(22)
Pass	29.03%	(126)
12 others	16.13%	(70)

Favourite Comic Book Cover

MASTER OF KUNG FU 67	5.07%	(22)
Detective Comics 476	4.15%	(18)
X-Men 114	3.92%	(17)
X-Men 111	3.22%	(14)
X-Men 113	2.76%	(12)
Pass	15.21%	(66)
108 others	65.67%	(285)

Favourite British Pro Comics Publication

2000 A.D.	29.72%	(129)
Starburst	15.21%	(66)
Starlord	10.83%	(47)
House of Hammer	2.30%	(10)
Near Myths = Graphixus = Axa	=1.38%	(6)
Pass	20.05%	(87)
others	17.74%	(77)

Favourite British Fan Publication

COMIC MEDIA NEWS	32.03%	(139)
Bem	21.43%	(93)
Graphic Sense	11.29%	(49)
Vertigo	1.61%	(7)
The Comic Review = Cerebro	=1.38%	(6)
Pass	22.58%	(98)
others	8.29%	(36)

Favourite British Writer

T.B. GROVER	12.44%	(54)
Steve Parkhouse	7.14%	(31)
John Howard = Pat Mills =	=5.53%	(24)
Steve Moore	2.30%	(10)
Pass	50.69%	(220)
11 others	16.36%	(71)

Favourite British Artist

JOHN BOLTON	14.75%	(64)
Brian Bolland	14.28%	(62)
Ian Gibson	4.61%	(20)
Dave Gibbons	4.15%	(18)
Carlos Ezquerra	3.69%	(16)
Pass	32.26%	(140)
22 others	26.27%	(114)

Favourite British Character

JUDGE DREDD	29.95%	(130)
Strontium Dog	11.06%	(48)
Dan Dare	3.46%	(15)
Robo-Hunter	2.76%	(12)
Ro-Jaws = Axa = Luther Arkwright =	=1.61%	(7)
Modesty Blaise =		
Pass	31.34%	(136)
15 others	14.98%	(65)

Roll of Honour

JACK KIRBY	10.37%	(45)
Will Eisner	6.91%	(30)
Siegel & Shuster	5.53%	(24)
Steve Gerber	5.30%	(23)
Superman	4.15%	(18)
Pass	3.22%	(14)
55 others	64.52%	(280)

Eagle Awards organised by Richard Burton & Mike Conroy. Vote counting and result tabulation by Richard Burton, Steve Craddock & Les Chester. Sponsored by Richard Burton, Colin Campbell, Mike Conroy, Forbidden Planet, Forever People, Nostalgia & Comics, Valhalla Books. Use of the "Eagle" insignia by kind permission of IPC Magazines Ltd. It is hoped to have the ballot forms for the 1979 awards ready for distribution with Bem-27 in early February.

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THE FIRST KINGDOM

an appreciation:

by Alan R. Cookson

People nowadays seem to be looking for something outside mainstream comics. Some keep asking for more adult comics; a few think they have found them with Warren magazines and undergrounds, the latter

advertised for over eighteens, but I don't see why an over-abundance of tits and violence makes for more "adult" reading. What I would have thought was being looked for is a more mature approach to the genre --and personally I think quite a few mainstream titles are more mature reading than some undergrounds and Warren at its worst, such as the early issues of 1984.

Well, if the search for something to get your teeth into has eluded you, and you are on the verge of giving up -- read on, and take heart.

Jack Katz will either mean nothing to you at all, or else you are one of the silent few in this country who has read and thoroughly enjoyed the first 8 parts of a projected 24-part marathon entitled "The First Kingdom". No matter which category you fall into, most of you will have one thing in common -- you probably know little or nothing about this very talented man, who, if he succeeds in producing the full 24 books, will have earned his place of honour in the history of comics, up there with Jack Kirby, Will Eisner, and all the greats he admires. In my book he is already up there--and I say this on the strength of just eight 32-page comics.

I must admit that, before The First Kingdom started to appear, I had no idea that Jack Katz existed; it was an interview with him featured in The Buyers Guide two years ago that caught my imagination. This guy Jack Katz, who had done comics on and off since the forties, at the age of 45 decides to dedicate the next twelve years of his life to a graphic novel (a posh word for a fancy comic), creating a new universe peopled with Gods, humans who live for hundreds of years, Trans-Gods, and mutations--a brand-new mythology in fact. The saga had already got to book 4 by the time I read this, and book 5 was on the way, so when I saw Colin Campbell advertising the first five books at 60p each, I sent for the lot. They arrived--and I was a little taken aback at the appearance of the interior layout. Each panel was so crammed with detail it didn't appeal to my eye as quickly as a classic Adams or Steranko splash page, and I must admit this initial impression put me off a little. Not being short of reading material at the time, I kept them filed away unread--I was definitely intrigued, though, and actually bought book 6 before I began to read them. When I did eventually get round to reading book 1, I found that all my misgivings were unfounded; it took me almost a week to get through all six books, but for the first time in years I was looking forward to my dinner time, when I would be able to digest more of the Katz magic along with my food.

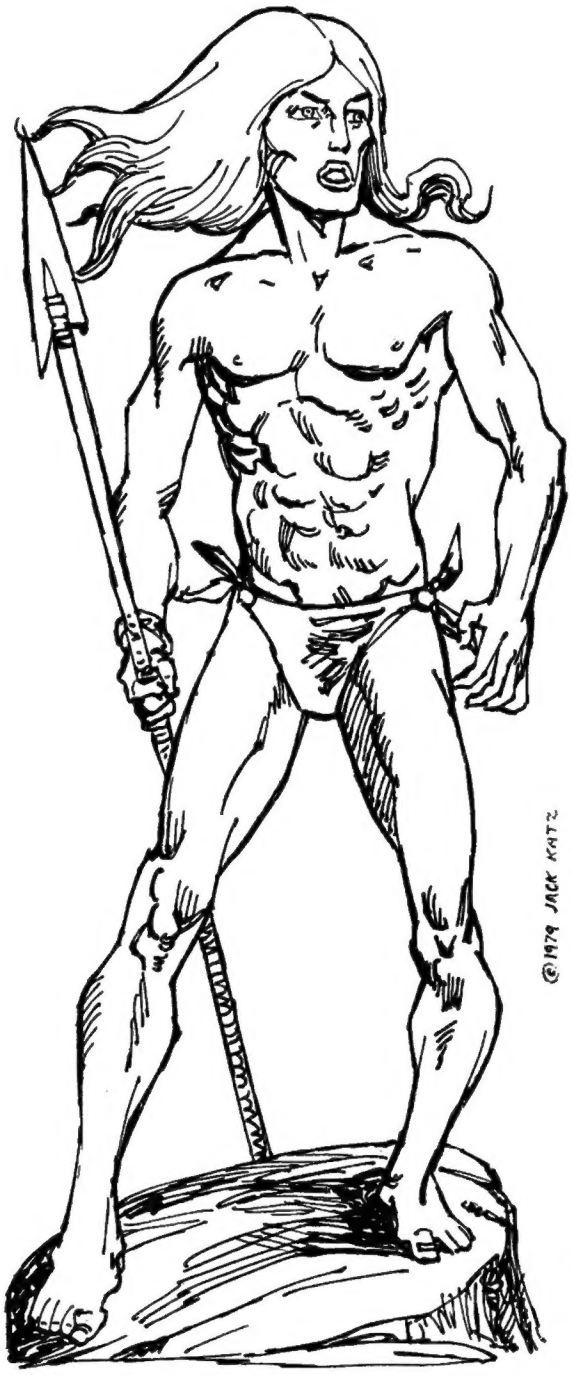
By the time I had reached the last page of book 6, my money was already in the post once more to Colin Campbell, as books 7 & 8 had now been published. And once I had read these with just as much enthusiasm, I came across the only problems, the damn near six month wait between issues, and the frustration of knowing it will take up to eight more years before the story is completely unfolded.

Before getting on to a brief biography of Jack Katz, let me advise anyone who has had a quick browse through an issue of The First Kingdom at a Mart, or in a shop, only to be put off by the detailed, closely packed artwork, so different from Marvel, DC or Warren, that once you have got into the first few pages, it is not at all hard to read, despite the lack of actual word balloons, though the wealth of detail makes it a work to linger over, not rush through in ten minutes. The art is magnificent, quite breath-taking at times, while the story is so laden with sub-plots one almost has to take notes. The extra concentration needed is richly rewarded; Sheila (my wife) and I are, to say the least, very impressed with this obvious labour of love.

As I said, I've only recently learned about Mr Katz and his work, and I'm still no expert on the subject; most of my information is dug out from a very long and detailed interview conducted by Shel Dorf in September 1976, and printed in The Buyers Guide.

Jack Katz was born in Brooklyn half a century ago. Although he was 4 years old before he started to talk, he claims he started drawing at the age of 2, and actually showed his interviewer a drawing his mother had recently given him, which had been done when he was 3. It's printed with the interview, and is a drawing of some futuristic machine-gun, with some incredible detail for a 3-year-old. Hell, at 28 I can't draw as well as that!

He drew like mad throughout his early years, and Jack finally found a purpose to all this drawing when a Sunday colour section made its way into the Katz house, and a Tarzan strip drawn by Hal Foster well and truly caught his imagination. Even to this day he still holds Foster in great esteem, and in fact dedicated the



first book to him, as he has dedicated subsequent books to his other heroes: Jack Kirby, Dean Cornwell, Alex Raymond, Lou Fine, Edward McCartan, Milton Caniff, J. C. Leyendecker, and Howard Pyle...and always his wife Carolyn gets a mention too, for her support and assistance.

As his father had a thing against newspapers, the young Katz had to scratch around for further inspiration, and was eventually bought a Tarzan "Big Little Book" -- but instead of Foster, this had been drawn by Alex Raymond. Jack was far from disappointed, however, and in fact Raymond replaced Foster in his heart for a short while.

Obviously, he excelled at art in school, and at about 15 or 16 he went on to The High School of Industrial Art in New York --where a teacher actually told him there

was nothing he could teach him, and suggested he paid regular visits to museums to study the masters, which he did with a friend. Through these many visits, he got involved with sculpting, which was to play an important rôle in his life later.

It was at 16 that Jack Katz actually earned his first money from his artistic ability; he was given some "Archie" and "Bulletman" scripts to pencil, after someone at the C.C. Beck studios saw his work, and sent him to another publisher where he thought he would get work. Then, a few weeks later, he got some more work from Jerry Eiger, who was Will Eisner's partner; not full pencils, only touching up and re-drawing pages. During this period he also ghosted for a few other established artists, though he refuses to say exactly who they were.

At nineteen he was offered a job as a staff artist at Fiction House, but turned this down in favour of being a general dogsbody at King Features, the newspaper strips syndicate, as this gave him the opportunity to be in the company of some of the greats of the time, including his two original idols, Hal Foster and Alex Raymond. One can easily see the attraction of working among these very talented and famous artists; however, Katz readily admits it probably held his own career in comics back somewhat, and in 1951 he finally decided to quit.

After King, he did work for 2 companies, Standard and Atlas, years before Atlas, once Timely, became the Marvel Comics Group. At Atlas he was under the editorial wing of a certain Stan Lee, who, in common with other editors of the time, didn't like Jack's inking style, saying it was more suited to newspaper strip work than comic books. Jack was assigned mainly pencil jobs only, on things like historical war stories, along with the mystery and horror stories then prevalent. It must be remembered that during this period the superhero was out of fashion, so Jack did not get a chance at the more prestigious strips that most famous pencilers get associated with in their early years.

At the age of 26, Jack Katz found the bottom was falling out of the comic book industry. After the Wertham anti-comics uproar, comics publishers found themselves going out of business wholesale. Although he was able to keep himself employed by going from one company to another, Jack eventually decided to quit the insecure world of comics, and started to teach sculpting -- although, once again, he did the occasional ghosting job in comics.

Anyway, after 14 years Jack decided the time was right to make a comeback, and in 1969 he began to work for Marvel, Warren, and National, before becoming Associate Editor at Skywald, then competitors for Warren in the horror magazine market. It was during his stay with Skywald that he started experimenting with the epic type of story that was eventually to bear fruit with The First Kingdom. It was with a strip called Zangar, which ran in the 3 issues of one of Skywald's short-lived line of colour comics, JUNGLE ADVENTURES, that he tried various ideas--and he states that, in the third episode, many of the ideas that are present in his current work are present. With the fourth tale, he started experimenting with his current epic-proportional drawing style -- but, despite the fact that this experimentation was very well received, due to the poor sales of the line Zangar was dropped.

In 1970/71, Jack submitted a story called "Targos" to Warren Publishing Co; it was accepted, and Thomas N. Scortia wrote a scenario over the original story. It was the most direct forerunner to The First Kingdom, with many concepts that have returned in that work; however, apparently, Jim Warren didn't think there was much of a future for this sort of thing, so once again Jack Katz was back to square one. "Targos", which was inked by Nebot, appeared in CREEPY #45, dated May 1972; it ran for ten pages.

After moving house from New York to California, it wasn't long before Jack discovered the alternative publishing scene--the underground comics. These gave the key as to how to handle the concept he had growing within him; so at this point he decided to cut himself off from the mainstream comics scene, and went into partnership with someone in the building trade. He worked for between 9 and 11 dollars an hour installing toilet bowls and building house extensions--and while he was doing this, he was also writing the whole 768 page story of The First Kingdom, broken down into 24 32-page books.

After finishing the art on the first 7 pages, he took it to "Comics and Comix Co", who at the time ran 4 comics shops in the San Francisco area; they picked up on it immediately, although even they had some initial reservations about Jack's revolutionary page layout, particularly the single-line separations between panels, as opposed to the double grid that is normally used, and the use of typed speech instead of hand lettering, and of course the lack of the normal word balloons. Anyway--Jack had found a publisher.

The first book of The First Kingdom appeared in 1974, and its print run of 10,000 copies sold out in 7 or 8 months, through mail order sales and just 5 local shops; by the time book 2 came out, they were already preparing its 2nd printing. All the early issues have been reprinted now, and the first six issues have been printed again in their entirety under one cover (the cover illustrated to book 5, re-coloured) by Pocket Books, in a larger 9¼" by 13" format and with an introduction by Theodore Sturgeon.

In his introduction to book 7, Steranko comments that readers will have realized that they are in the midst of "a neo-classic, far different from the overground assembly-line spectaculars they have been force-fed for the past decade. Immediately evident is the artist's feverish energy and keen integrity which is sustained without let-up from start to finish. Katz works like an atomic reactor, overloading to a dangerous intensity to produce a wealth of staggering & meticulous detail that leaves even the most hardboiled comic illustrators awestruck. The detail is 50% ink line, 50% heartbeat."

In his mid forties, Jack Katz discarded security to embark on a strange, outrageously different project; the early times were hard, but, backed up by his wife, he persevered, despite tempting commercial offers. He deserved to succeed; and he is succeeding. It's great that there are enough people responding to Jack's work to bring him the acclaim he deserves, their number can only expand as the saga continues. As Tom Scortia says in book 1's introduction to book 1, "Jack Katz is a Man Who Believes. Believe with him too."

I realise that I haven't given anyone much idea what the actual story is about, but my intention for this piece was more to bring the existence of this series to the attention of any fans in this country who haven't yet sampled this monumental work; and if anyone wants a condensed run-down on the first five books, there is an excellent piece in The Comics Journal 38 by Bill Sherman. But take it from me, if you don't check the series out, it's your loss--and don't let me hear you complain about there not being any good quality comic reading produced these days.

ALTHOUGH YOU DIDN'T DEMAND IT:
THE RETURN OF

SIGH

8: DON'T ASK ME, I'M A STRANGER MYSELF

Hello again, folks! Yes, it's me again, turning up like the proverbial bad penny. But am I back to stay this time, you wonder? Sorry, not even I know that...

Anyway, the subject is still basically "living in an unstable comicdom", but this time with the emphasis on "how to stop worrying and learn to take what comes"

Y'know, there was a time, ooh...weeks ago, when I actually thought I understood the machinations of the comics companies, and of fandom, and what makes comics tick, and so forth -- but, to paraphrase GL 76, I'd been fooling myself. No, it seems there are more things in heaven & earth, and particularly in the wacky world of comicdom, Horatio, than are accounted for even by my philosophy. But then...So what? Does it really matter?

For the past five years or so, since I've been in fandom (or around the fringes of it, anyway), I've been taking it upon myself to try and explain the workings of comics to others. Now in retrospect this seems peculiarly arrogant of me... What made me think I knew all the answers? True, I've been reading comics for nigh on twenty years now; true, I've been reading fanzines since I first became aware of their existence; true, I'd picked up a couple of things from other sources ...but looking back now I'm staggered, almost appalled, at my presumption of knowledge, where in fact all I had was hearsay and guesswork.

Pretty good guesswork, mind...

I don't know about things. I can guess; I can speculate; on a good day, I can even deduce. But I don't know.

But then -- so what? I mean, who really knows what's going on? Hmm? And when all is said and done, does it really matter?

A revolutionary idea? Well, let me try and explain my thinking -- always a risky business, but never mind. See, I've been re-reading my collection of comics (that's the 10,000-plus collection that I may possibly have boasted, er, mentioned, before...) of late, and I have come to a startling conclusion, one I expect virtually everyone will disagree with (so what else is new?), to wit: there ain't no such animal as a bad comic.

(Pause for gasps, jeers, et cetera)

Actually, this isn't all that radical an idea, as the more astute among you will already appreciate. Sure, everyone can give a list of comics they'd have no hesitation in calling 'bad' -- but the odds are that each list would be different. Because 'bad' and 'good' are purely subjective terms, and everyone has different criteria. Therefore it's obvious that there can't be an objectively 'bad' comic. So why am I bothering to state the obvious? Because (a) it seems as though no-one else ever does; and (b) it may help to explain the following bit...

Back in the dim, distant past of several weeks back, I'd have had little hesitation in dismissing THE MICRONAUTS as a 'bad' comic--though hardly in such mild terms. I mean, I've seen comics that were 99% rip-off from other sources, but this one's 125% rip-off. Kirby's 4th World stories, Star Wars, Adam Strange, Guardians of the Galaxy, Kirby's 4th World stories, Kamandi, more SF stories (comic, book, or film) than you can shake a ray-gun at, Star Trek, Kirby's 4th World... Need I go on?

And then there's the ultra right-wing politics of the thing. It seems that the Microverse used to have a--quote--'ideal' society, which not only had a ruling royal family, but by Bill Mantlo's own script was split into rich and poor. Perhaps Bill meant that it was ideal for the rich and powerful. Oh, and I don't suppose I need to mention that at least three of the heroes are of royal stock, do I? No, of course not--what else could they be?

And all that's before we even come to the 'action', which seems to consist, for the larger part, of the bad guys shooting unspecified rays at the good guys, and the good guys shooting unspecified rays at the bad guys.. Gee whillikers...

But wait a minute, I hear you screaming, what about the art? Ah yes, the legendary Golden artwork. We-ell, it's very nice... and very competent...but, well, I'm sorry, but it doesn't really look all that imaginative or innovative to me. Better than average; like I say, nice... But I've seen plenty of nice art in comics over the years--what's so special about this?

Right, well, it sounds as though the hammering's finished now, and the gallows is all ready and waiting for me...So let me hastily add, to everyone's undoubted confusion, that I quite like THE MICRONAUTS...in a way.

Y'see, the idea of a comic being 'bad' is purely subjective; it depends largely on what aspects you pick on. Everything's got positive aspects, as well as negative ones. In the case of MICRONAUTS, the positive aspect which appeals to me -- if I let it -- is that it's fun. I like the idea of a kid swatting an alien spaceship with a lawn rake. I like the idea of an ageing ex-astronaut being temporarily transformed into a world-saver (just like that). I like the idea of characters reporting the presence of aliens and spaceships, and being (reluctantly) believed by the authorities (makes a change, no?). There's all sorts of things I enjoy --if I let myself.

It's a bit like that Superman movie: as a comics purist, I'd have to condemn it; as an SF purist, I'd have to condemn it; as a viewer I enjoyed it.

But I'm straying from my point a bit. I used to think I knew what was 'a good idea', as far as new directions in comics were concerned. I had no hesitation in saying that revivals of Man-Thing and Subby would be doomed to swift & certain failure... On reflection, I still find my reasoning for this quite sound. But, the last I heard, Marvel still seem to want to go ahead, despite presumably 'knowing' the same things I 'know'. Personally, I still can't see how they could make Manny 'viable' without drastically altering (i.e. mutilating) the character; I can't see how they could make Subby 'viable' without drastically altering (i.e. improving) the character. But perhaps they 'know' something I don't.

I don't know... (If you'll pardon the repetition.) Perhaps they know that they don't know--or perhaps they like to think that they know they don't know. Or perhaps I ought to quit while I'm ahead.

The point is: does it really matter? Such things aren't within our power to affect, so why worry? Shouldn't we just learn to take what comes, and accept it for what it is? Sit back and enjoy it, as it were...?

I don't know. All of the aforegoing is simply random ideas, speculation... But does it, perchance, strike upon something deep and important? I don't know. But then, does it really--cosmically speaking --matter?

Might see you again next time. But I don't really know. -K. WILLIAMS

KATHOLICITY

BY KATHLEEN GLANCY

When, more than a year ago, I read the interview with Chris Claremont in CMNI in which he stated his intention of putting a crimp in the Cyclops/Phoenix romance by having the main body of X-Men believe Phoenix and Beast were dead and vice versa, my first reaction was that he had to be joking. After all, he was the writer of an award-winning series, they keep telling us on the cover. He shouldn't have to use extremely old and hackneyed and never terribly convincing plots like this. The idea of two lovers each believing the other dead had its heyday in Victorian melodrama, although the basic idea is much older. Much. Besides, I thought, it was all very well in Victorian days but in a story set in the modern age of instant communication & widespread media coverage it is going to be difficult to maintain any sort of credibility or continuity. But there, I thought, he is an award-winning writer. Maybe he can manage it. We'll see.

We've seen. And now that this aspect of the plot is at last over--it seems to have gone on for years, and was getting very boring -- all I can say is...he blew it. Take an aged, aged plot and stretch it out too far and too long, and you get great, gaping holes. To take the major examples:

When the X-Men automatically assumed Hank and Jean were dead, that was thoroughly stupid, for a start. Giving up on Hank was fairly logical--but shouldn't it have struck these supposedly intelligent people that someone who had already survived a solar flare might be able to handle a mere volcano?

Jean Grey and Misty Knight meet each other. "How's Scott?" asks Misty. Jean, who thinks Scott is dead, says nothing. Now, suppose your lover has died, and a friend who hasn't heard asks after him/her. It hurts, of course. But do you clam up, and leave your friend either to do the same thing again next time you meet, which will in turn hurt you again, or to hear about it from another source & feel terrible? This makes Jean look pretty peculiar.

For a while it looked as if Cyke wasn't going to tell Misty or Colleen Wing about Jean's supposed demise. Then it struck someone that this would put Colleen in a very poor light, since her pursuit of Scott would, if she thought Jean was alive, show her as a man-stealer. And man-stealers, for obvious reasons, tend not to have any close female friends. (Incidentally, her character has been pretty well destroyed. Where is the Samurai in this wet-knickered typical romantic interest? Mind you, when you take supporting characters designed for one series and drag them willy-nilly into another to which they are not really suited, their credibility is bound to suffer. Claremont's attitude in this was both selfish--imagine the chaos if everyone did it--and childish. You can almost hear him scream "They're my dollies, and you're not going to play with them") So anyway, in issue 123 it is implied that Scott has told Colleen. Now, either they haven't told Misty, which is incredible, or they have and she hasn't asked when & how it happened--she is supposed to be a caring friend -- and worked out that she saw Jean after it was supposed to have happened--she is after all supposed to be a successful detective. There goes her character credibility.

Then there's the Banshee. He is, we are told, in love with Moira McTaggart. He wants to marry her. So he doesn't make the smallest effort to contact her for months, although (since he can't know she thought him dead) he must think that she must be getting worried about him. Someone had best read him Young Lochinvar to remind him of what can happen to laggards in love.

Cyclops, on the other hand, does try to phone Moira. Or rather, in issue 122, he says he must. He says the X-Men need access to Professor X's money urgently, since their savings have run out, and Moira is his trustee. But in X-Men 123, weeks, from internal evidence, have passed. They have not been in touch with Moira. How they have managed to eat is a mystery.

Last but not least, the bounding Beast. You know, the Avenger. He is the reason that the X-Men's ignorance of his and Phoenix's survival should not have lasted a day after their return to civilisation-- because the first thing they did should have been to call the Avengers and tell them one of their members had perished. And even if the Assemblers were out on a case, Jarvis would have soon disabused them of their erroneous idea. Still, they have been acting like idiots throughout, so suppose they didn't try to break the news. They still should have found out once they were back in New York. The Avengers' exploits receive wide coverage, and their recent membership problems would make them frequent appearers on television and in the newspapers. Too, I should think the Beast's social life must make him personally a shining light in the gossip columns. It should not have taken the X-Men weeks to find out he was alive, and then only when he dropped by their place.

All in all, award-winning Claremont has produced, by his use of this hoary & silly sub-plot, a story-line whose credibility & continuity is worthy of Haney and Kirby working in collaboration. I wouldn't mind so much if it was them, but he can do better. Or he used to be able to do better. And I trust he will in the future.

But I have a horrible doubt. I have this premonition that Mariko is in the U.S.A. because she is terminally ill, and undergoing treatment there, and we are going to be treated to Claremont's version of 'Love Story', with the Wolverine in the Ryan O'Neal part. Believe me, I sincerely hope I'm totally wrong. -KATHLEEN GLANCY

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Reaction

Dean Smith Who is Chris Ash, and why is he saying these nasty things?

But seriously folks, after reading Chris Ash's letter in Bem-24 I had to go and read "Thrillkill" and "A View From Without" once more for myself--just to make sure that we were talking about the same stories. Surely the whole point of "Thrillkill" is that the captions are ironic, not only in the context of the individual pictures they are used with, but also when taken as a complete story; the "logical" reaction of someone who breaks under the "double-think" of what Church and State present as "good" and "truth", and the actual state of the world around us.

The same is also true of "A View From Without". I thought that the whole point of the story was that after a "dispassionate" portrayal of events in Vietnam, and the reasons for the war (which were made to look pointless), the young man opens another letter which turns out to be orders to join the army, only with its well known salutation of "Greetings" it sounds more like an invitation to a Sunday afternoon picnic. (But then, perhaps Chris didn't know that that word and the typeface used were meant to convey that point.)

It would seem that if we are to have "serious artistic endeavour" in comics there must be an audience that knows what it's looking at, as indeed with any art form. (When I think of the times I looked at "The Disappearing Bust of Voltair" by Dali before actually seeing that disappearing bust--)

I'm glad to see, Mike, that you won't be dropping controversial subjects from Reaction after all, though I can understand your reasons for considering it. Not only would I not want to feel responsible for confusing any youngsters, but there are no doubt any number of anxious parents who might be ready to pounce on you with screams of "pervert!" Not that I, as a parent, would object to anything that has been printed in Reaction to date; also, there has been a wide range of opinions expressed here, and that can only be healthy.

Though there are some subjects which, to contradict myself, tend to be one-sided. For example there has been comment recently about the well endowed female of the species being predominant, but nobody has mentioned the distinct lack of appendages on the male form! From Superman to Bat-Mite, they all wear skintight suits with never a bulge in sight! The only one we can't be sure about is Hawkeye--but, since he wears that ton-ton/skirt affair, perhaps it's best not to talk about *him* at all. There are all sorts of storylines opened up when superheroes are drawn realistically. Would Lois Lane lose interest in Superman? Could Mary Jane see through Spider-Man's disguise? Does Green Lantern's ring affect the parts that other super-powers cannot reach? */(With all the heroines in sexy skin-tight costumes, group meetings might be somewhat embarrassing for all those heroes, if their minds were wandering from the . . . er . . . matter at hand.)/*

Enough of this drivel.

I see that the dialogue with the S.O.C.E. continues on its merry way, without really getting anywhere. As you say though, what do they offer which is not already catered for elsewhere? Well, a couple of suggestions I could make are, (a), why not act as a central clearing house for fanzines. If I could write to the S.O.C.E. and receive a dozen or so fanzines, instead of having to write a dozen different letters and send a dozen S.A.E.s or whatever, plus only one cheque or postal order, then I would buy a lot more fanzines, and presumably members could get a small discount. And (b), why not get those hard-to-find non-distributed issues for members? The professional dealers charge way over the odds for things like NOVA, SPIDER-WOMAN, the 50 cent DCs, etc; even INVADERS No. 1 is overpriced at £2. If the S.O.C.E. was offering comics like these at reasonable prices I'd be more likely to join. */(Two very good ideas; (a) is probably more feasible than (b), though the Society does operate a cheap import scheme, via Colin Campbell.)/*

I've not taken time to comment on the articles in Bem this time round, so I'll just mention that I liked the Bill Mantlo interview very much. I think he's one of the best "mainstream" scripters to come along since Stan Lee; in fact, his style reminds me a lot of that gentleman. The only other regular scripter working in comics at the moment who doesn't seem contrived or hackneyed is Doug Moench. Could we have an interview with him some time? (By "mainstream" and "regular" I am, of course, excluding people like Jim Starlin and Steve Englehart--I'm talking about the people who produce page after page, month after month.)

I shall be sorry to see the end of "Unamerican Activities", as it was something unique in fandom and one of my own personal favourites. I hope you can get someone else to do this column, rather than let it go. Even if it's only once in a while it would be better than nothing. */(Luckily, Mal Burns has volunteered to take over the British beat; the column is bound to be different, but I'm sure that Mal's inside knowledge of the more adventurous part of the publishing scene will make it required reading! -ML)/*

Before I finish, just a quick word about the cover, very impressive. Your covers get better each time. Dez Skinn certainly started something when he redesigned the Marvel U.K. magazines--that left-hand column is of course very handy, as dealers can display more mags and not get them damaged by customers flipping through them to look at contents. Carry on like this and it won't be long before we see Bem on the shelves at the corner newsagents.

Mark Finch Didn't like the cover of Bem-24 at all--an anticlimax after so many good ones. Anyway, further into the 'zine revealed that the contents were as good, if not better, than usual. Reaction, being the heart of the 'zine, was as good as ever; however, I disagree with Gordon Smith over his comments on Superman: The Movie. Even when someone finally makes a big-appeal, faithful-to-the-original adaptation of a comics character for the wide screen that *succeeds* in its task (i.e. to suspend the audience's disbelief), someone else has to find fault with it! The whole message behind Superman's reversal of time is which 'force' will prove to be stronger: Superman's loyalty to his father, or his love for Lois? The fact that the latter force is stronger leads logically into Superman II, in which the Lois Lane/Superman relationship is strengthened. This comes with the realisation that Superman has been pushed into this situation by his father, who sent him to earth knowing he would be more powerful than us, and have to accept the consequences. Superman has finally realised that it is best for him to 'ignore' his powers and act human, when his father appears again (the Fortress of Solitude scene)--against his will--and re-awakens his desire to acknowledge his dominance over humans. yet again suppressing this urge, he meets Lois who is the cause of his 'unbalancing', because he has to reveal his powers to rescue her. Thus there is the underlying theme that Superman is being 'exploited' both by Lois and his father, which will inevitably drive him to insanity. Without sounding too pretentious, I'd say that Superman represents a contemporary Hamlet; both are 'normal' beings, thrust into situations of enormous pressure by their fathers (Hamlet's 'mission' is to "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be A Couch for luxury and damned incest . . . taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive against thy mother aught", i.e. dispose of the King who murdered me, without distressing the Queen (your mother) or corrupting yourself; Superman's is to not "interfere with human history, rather let your leadership inspire others to greatness. Live as one of them . . . but always hold in your heart pride at your special heritage"--obviously, both these commands are equally impossible to fulfil); and both struggle to be loyal to their father and the one they love (the Queen/Lois Lane). Superman's story is not yet complete, but so far he has 'betrayed' his father by interfering with human history for Lois; Hamlet's story we know--eventually he obeys his father and kills the King, but there are other deaths (his own included) and insanity as a result. It seems impossible for Superman now to behave as a human, because he has revealed himself (!)-originally, he didn't want to be different, but nurtured a secret desire (like most of us) to have power over others; unfortunately, Superman does have this power, and so succumbs to temptation.

But back to the main theme, the suspension of one's disbelief as Superman soars above skyscrapers and does various deeds of do-gooding. This is achieved admirably by putting the title character through a series of film styles and genres, and making him respond realistically, thus making him real in our eyes, and thus making us believe his every action. First, we are thrust into a world of total fantasy (perhaps a false move; wouldn't it be better to start at reality and work outwards?), and as if to counteract our apprehension are told "This is no fantasy, no careless product of wild imagination". The film works downwards from this spectacularly fantastic start to show hot Jor-El is disbelieved by other members of the council as he tells them of Krypton's imminent destruction--this is bringing the story into terms of character conflict, realistic and plausible. When the planet's destruction does arrive, it is seen against the backdrop of the rest of the galaxy, retaining a hint of realism, as does the starship's "Einstein Theory" and entry into earth's gravity. From then on, young Clark Kent's acts become progressively more powerful, until we are introduced to the undentified ice setting where normally our credulity would be strained, but as we have followed this through for forty minutes we *believe* it's happening . . . the logical conclusion to this sequence is to see Superman's greatest feat, to see him fly. And he does! "You'll believe a man can fly" is a neat capsulation of the essence of the film, to make one believe *this* is for real (cf. CE*III*). See the Golden Gate earthquake scene again--if that is't realism, what is? There are few fantasy films (including sf and horror in the genre) which can boast a sense of realism. "Curse of Frankenstein" doesn't. "This Island Earth" doesn't. "Superman" *does.* Admirably! */(I think most fans would agree that the Superman film, and its multi-million dollar serious treatment, was a real treat for fandom, and that criticism is really in the category of nit-picking. In retrospect, the most jarring aspect for me was the campy Luthor, not the flaws of the story. Does anybody know when Superman II is scheduled for release? I enjoyed your Hamlet/Superman analogy by the way, though, judging from the first part only of course, Superman is in no way a tragic figure, and the god-like film version is very difficult to relate to.)/*

Oh, Martin, perhaps you could persuade Ed Sallis to mention the following please? I'm thinking of producing a one-off collectors guide and overview to Gerry Anderson shows and related material; as a WORLDS production, it will be similar in format, non-profit making, around 24-30 pages and 40-50p in price. I'd be interested to hear from people (a) who might have something to contribute, and/or (b) might be interested in buying a copy, so I have an approximate idea of how many to print. In the case of (b), there's no obligation if you do write, and the more who do, the lower the price will be. Co-editor is B.J. Sheehan, who writes a G.A. column for WORLDS. Thanks!

Tim Wallis First, the price-rise in Bem, with a change to type-setting. I've no objection myself and, as you say, it should ease your work-load and perhaps allow a sixth issue each year. The only problem is--will the sudden rise in price reduce sales? I hope not.

Bem-24. Interesting Mantlo interview, nice to see some "Rom" work in advance. I was slightly surprised to see Bill said that he and Michael Golden got nothing for the use of The Micronauts in STAR WARS WEEKLY. Seems somewhat unfair to me. Do Goodwin & Infantino get anything for the early use of "Star Wars" in the same comic? I thought payment was made for repeats--or is that only in America? */(Yes, I believe so, though moves are afoot to alter the situation.)/*

Having mentioned one of Dez Skinn's weeklies/monthies, I'll say a bit more on them.

HULK COMIC has its good points and its bad ones. Somewhat unfortunately, the bad ones are mainly the Hulk material. Paul Neary's covers are very tiring, and the use of David Lloyd's inks on his pencils inside turns the Hulk artwork into something very much below par. Richardson's inks were better, or even more so the one week's pages inked by Neary himself. Especially when I think how nice Lloyd's pencils & inks were on NightRaven.

Not that the story-lines of the Hulk episodes are any better. Black Knight/Captain Britain does make good use of Neary's pencils, though, with Stoke's dominating inks. And here the storyline--even though a little confusing--is very successful. The same can be said of Nick Fury, with Dillon's art perhaps the most interesting except for Night-Raven. I hope Moore/Dillon do Ant-Man as well as they did Fury.

Night-Raven. After issue 6 I was bored with this character, but the longer stories since then have restored my interest. Two problems with Bolton's arrival; though half a side.less (why?), and we lose Lloyd's pencils.

Eternals is just another repeat, as is the "What If" story currently split over what seems like a hundred issues. Ant-Man was nice to see as a repeat, but *why* finish before the story introducing the Wasp? Surely to have reprinted that and included the Wasp in the new material would be better? Ah well. */(And it looks as if Dez had second thoughts, as Nick Fury has continued beyond No. 19, and the tale introducing the Wasp has been reprinted. Happy now? -ML)/*

All in all, a *successful* comic--which is more than can be said for MARVEL COMIC and SPIDER-MAN COMIC, though the couple of issues of MARVEL using stock U.S. material not previously seen were nice. */(I hear that Marvel U.S.A. sent photocopies of some short stories, asking if U.K. wanted to use them--and such was the urgency that Marvel U.K. went straight ahead and printed from the less-than-perfect copies! -ML)/* It's also nice to see Dez Skinn using material previously missed out, such as HULK 161 and SPIDER-MAN 62. But all in all, it's a failure.

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IN NUMBER TWO

BRIAN BOLLAND

MIKE TAYLOR TALKS TO THE RENOWNED JUDGE DREDD ARTIST ABOUT VARIOUS ASPECTS OF COMICS.

COMICON '79

A CONVENTION REPORT: HAVE CONS BECOME TOO COMMERCIAL?

MOONSTONE;

A FOUR PAGE STRIP BY MARTIN LOCK AND HARRY McAVINCHEY:

HAWKWIND;

AN APPRECIATION OF THE POPULAR ROCK BAND WHO MANAGE TO BLEND WEIRD FANTASY INTO THEIR MUSIC AND INCLUDE MICHAEL MOORCOCK AMONGST THEIR NUMBER:

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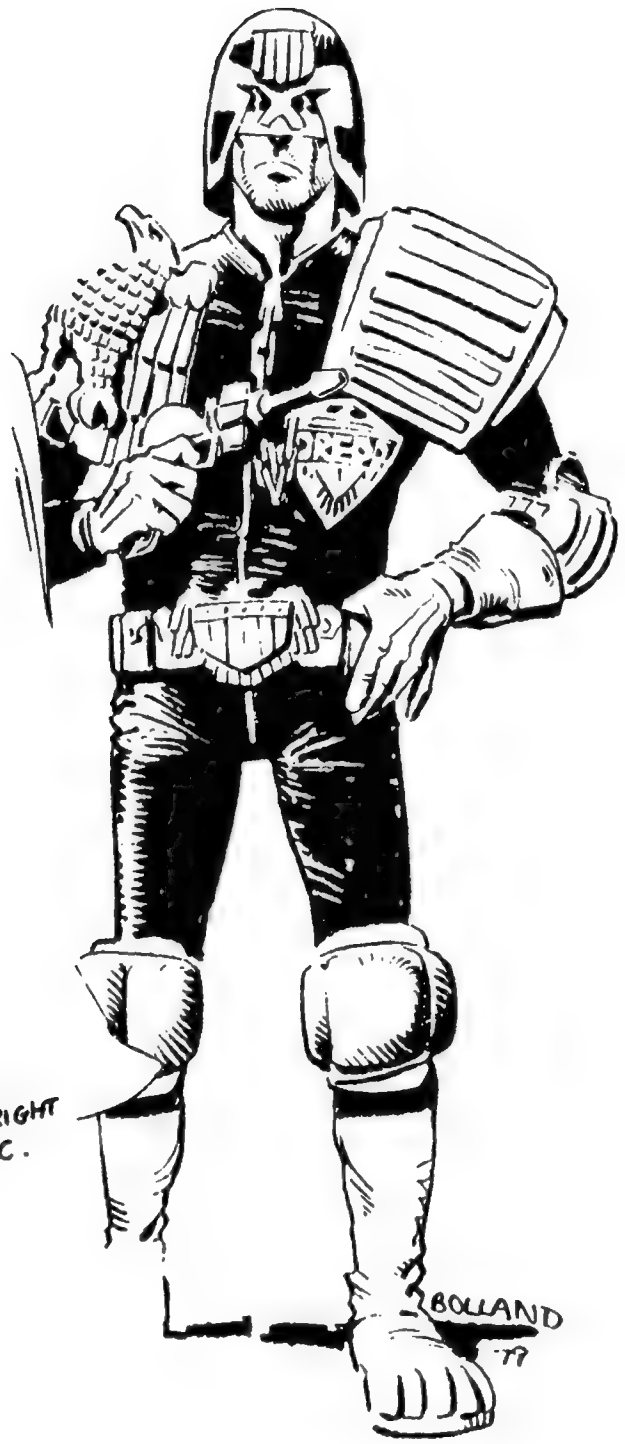

OUT AT THE START OF NOVEMBER.

RAMPAGE MONTHLY suffers from pages cut out of the X-MEN portion; SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN suffers from being too much a repeat mag; STARBURST seems slightly desperate for good material, coming out monthly; and STAR WARS WEEKLY contains so little Star Wars material now I'm surprised it's still selling? Maybe the other contents keep it selling?

Dez plugged the SPIDER-MAN HOLIDAY SPECIAL as containing a story "previously unseen in the U.K."--oh yeah? What was that in the 1977 SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL, then?

The Hulk TV show seems to be getting very unfavourable comments in various fanzines. I'm of the opposite view, and I'll defend that position here. One common fan complaint is that it's so different from the comic version. Of course, we'd all like the comic strip transferred direct to film, but I think anyone expecting that is hoping for too much from a TV series. I feel Kenneth Johnson, the show's executive producer, made the right decision--to shift the emphasis of the show rather than do a cheap imitation of the Marvel version. Another complaint was the show's lack of humour. That for me was a plus--so many U.S. shows have too much humour in them. Even then, the Hulk's not *without* humour--there's just a greater proportion of sadness than usual.

Even though a fan of the show, I had complaints on the first series. Basically it was the same plot week after week: David Banner gets job, meets woman (man) in trouble, tries to help, turns into Hulk and worsens situation, comes back as Banner, starts a romance, helps more, turns into Hulk, saves the day, a farewell as investigative reporter Jack McGee arrives . . . */(I think the series missed out by making the Hulk too bestial. The clouded-brain Marvel version allows for more pathos, though all that introspection would be difficult to convey on the box, a Jim Wilson or Rick Jones would be necessary as someone for the Hulk to express his inner torment to, and might be an asset to the series anyway.)/*

Fortunately, the last episode in the first series, the double-length "Married", and the second series have mostly solved that problem. "Married" took one of Banner's romances to its limit (before inevitably killing Carolyn, his wife), and managed to run its full length with no criminal, even getting the Hulk and Banner appearing together. The appearances of the Hulk here were probably the most menacing so far. Bill Bixby described the first pilot as a classic--I'll describe "Married" as just as much of a classic. Its writer, Kenneth Johnson, was able to really put emotion onto the small tube as Banner/Hulk lost Carolyn. */(Wasn't "Married" just a predictable extension of the romance/leaving-girl-behind pattern? Perhaps it worked once, but any similar situation would be outright melodrama.)/*

Start of second series. Banner hasn't changed to the Hulk for months, hidden away in "A Solitary Place" in the forest, still far from forgetting Carolyn. A woman appears, but David shies away from all romance, and at the end doesn't even have the usual farewell, just drifting on unnoticed. A few episodes later comes the 2-parter "Mystery Man" (by Nicholas Corea, producer). In a crash Banner loses his memory, and ends up in hospital face to face with McGee - his secret's safe, though, his face is covered in bandages. McGee knows this amnesiac has seen the Hulk, and takes him by helicopter to see a specialist. The chopper crashes and McGee, his leg broken, is carried through the forest on a makeshift sled by Banner. Forest fire--and the Hulk saves the day, but McGee learns that a person changes into the Hulk, though he has yet to find out who that man is.

Sounds corny, but a very well handled episode. I wonder how many ITV regions will show it out of sequence? Later episodes show a greater continuity than previous ones; so far there has been no romance at all in the second series, very few criminals. Some episodes have centred more on Jack McGee (e.g. "The Confession"), with hardly anything seen of Banner.

What now for the TV series, though? The executive producer, Kenneth Johnson, is reported to be more and more in favour of having the Hulk speak; the American ratings are inevitably slipping, which might help persuade him to add something new like that. Inevitably McGee must discover that David Banner is still alive, and ultimately that he is the creature. Whether the TV show can last that long is a different matter. New TV shows, and new U.S. comics, are prone to failure. Till then, all that can be done is to add more to McGee's character, and to the background of the show. "The Confession" did this well, noting that throughout the USA the number of "Hulk Freaks" was by no means negligible.

Ken Moore The cover of Bem-24 *stank*. Not due to the fact that it was drawn by Mike Golden, but because of the garish colouring. Printed in black & white only, that cover would have been excellent, but badly coloured as it was, I think that the perfect description is "an eyesore".

It is interesting to note that it was originally to be the cover of MICRONAUTS 1. I think that it should have been, instead of the awful cover which *was* used. That Cockrum/Milgrom job would put anyone off buying the book: the extremely intriguing Golden one would have attracted *more* readers. I wnder why it was relegated to being only a house ad? */(Possibly because it was too subtle, too confusing and lacked exciting, dramatic impact. I certainly wouldn't have used it for MICRONAUTS 1.)/*

Well, after those sweeping statements in the first paragraph, I would have to say that, apart from Katholicity, the cover was the only bad thing about Bem-24.

Pete Scott's CE3K article was very good. One of the things that struck me about that film was that Spielberg seemed to be suggesting, as Pete implied, that Neary was a modern day Moses, and also perhaps that it was *not* God who Moses met on Mount Sinai, but that it might have been extra-terrestrial beings who might have *seemed* like gods to him. When you think about that, it's a very happy message: if there is no God, then how, and why, do we exist? An idea about that has been floating around my brain for a few years now, and it is this: was the idea that Roy Thomas and Doug Moench put across in MARVEL PREVIEW No. 1 (Man Gods From Beyond The Stars) true, or close to the truth? Could we just have been created for the amusement of some incredibly highly advanced alien race? Or perhaps, as MARVEL PREVIEW No. 13 (The UFO Connection) suggests, are we just food for that race? One thing I'd like to get straight is that I'm not a heathen, I do believe in God, but some of these things are quite disturbing, although I don't actually *believe* then to be true. */(Your suggestions, and most others, presume some sort of planning. I prefer to believe we're just an accident, the result of an haphazard jumble of circumstances and coincidences.)/*

I think that probably the greatest virtue of CE3K was that it made you *think*. When I came out of the cinema, I was absolutely dazzled, hundreds of thoughts running through my mind. Whereas, I came out of Star Wars laughing and entertained, out of Jaws saying that I was never going near the sea again (and I actually have not been swimming in the sea since then), CE3K *demanded* more thought (of the serious vein) on the subject. It should have been entitled CE3K--The Thinking Man's Film. I noticed many people went to see it expecting a film for purely entertainment reasons like Star Wars, and were disappointed in that respect. CE3K was something closer to science fact than science fantasy, as Star Wars was. So, many people not possessing "an ounce of imagination" (as Richard Burton said) went to see Star Wars and were disappointed because they just wanted to see something as simple as a John Wayne film, and so they were of course hopelessly lost, as, to many of them John Wayne films were the limit. Of course I mean no disrespect to The Duke, who made some very good films which are also fun to watch, God rest his soul. It's just that you cannot possibly compare his films to the like of Star Wars, 2001, Silent Running, etc; they are a totally different type of film. The sf films normally appeal to younger people. */(CE3K made you wonder whether there were any extraterrestrials flying around, but I don't think it made you ponder enough on their nature, friendly or otherwise, nor their origin, nor their relationship with us, nor their intent, nor the results of the encounter. Again, I'm nitpicking, but I found the forced humour (one of the crafts appearing behind Neary's van; his breakdown) and terror (the abduction of the little boy) irritating. John Wayne made several 'cerebral' westerns, e.g.* 'Red River', 'The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance', *and* 'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon' *to name but three, though the nature of those films undoubtedly had more to do with the director (Ford?) than Wayne.)/*

The Bill Mantlo interview was surprisingly frank, for someone whom I had always taken as Stan Lee's little pet writer. Can't say that I'm as enthusiastic about Chaykin drawing five issues of MICRONAUTS; his work for comics these days is quite awful, although the 20-page segment of Alfred Bester's "The Stars My Destination" in March's HEAVY METAL was his best work in a long, long time. He seems to be able to work a lot better when he can paint his art, rather than work in black ink, at which he seems less adept at working with. */(I share your doubts about Chaykin, and never have been wildly enthusiastic about his work, even way back in the totally uncontrolled SWORD OF SORCERY. His Marvel work now seems pure hack, his Heavy Metal output has nice colouring, layouts and figure work but his inking is diabolical.)/* Bill Mantlo made a good point about the Micronauts toys being rather crude as far as projections jutting from some parts of the characters, and even worse, the places from which the missiles etc are fired. Truly bizarre. I'm surprised that there hasn't been a multi-media kick-up as far as this aspect of the toys goes.

Wendy Young About a fortnight ago I walked into **Forbidden Planet**, and in addition to the usual comics and books found copies of BEM and CEREBRO; henceforth my life will never be the same. You've no idea how a comic freak who has only ever found one person to share her enthusiasm feels on discovering that there are many people with intelligence and full of interesting ideas who enjoy reading comics. */(Well, don't keep it to yourself -- who are these people, and where do they live?)/*

I would have found Bem interesting just for the interview with Bill Mantlo and the news and review sections, but when I came to Reaction I was bowled over. It was for me the high spot of the zine, and the various letters sparked off dozens of trains of thought. Still, I can't include them all in one letter, so I'll select one or two that I feel more strongly about.

An interesting point raised by Kathleen was whether or not Wanda appears to be growing fonder of Hawkeye. I believe this to be the case, but would say that rather than suggesting a sisterly concern or a newly awakening passion for Clint this development is indicative of growing difficulties in her relationship with the Vision. Okay, absence makes the heart grow fonder etc., but nevertheless it could be that Wanda, finding things haven't been working out between her and the Vision, may be viewing Clint through rose-coloured specs, as the alternative she refused. You may think I'm over-interpreting, but Wanda certainly appears to be fonder of Hawkeye (since his return there are a number of occasions where Wanda has been shown with him as opposed to the Vision, and in last year's annual when the team split up Wanda was in the same group as Clint, NOT the Vision -- these things don't just happen, y'know), and I feel that my point of view is supported by Wanda going off on her quest without the Vision. Despite Moondragon's forced 'enlightenment' on Pietro, the Vision must still feel resentment for Pietro's past behaviour, and is unlikely to risk being superseded in his wife's affections by standing by while Pietro resumes his role of guardian brother. Unless of course there is already a rift. . . This could help explain the Vision's cruel behaviour towards Jocasta in AVENGERS 185, since I think that he would normally treat her with sympathy and understanding, recalling his own troubles in the past. Indeed his question, "How can a machine worry?" seems directed more against himself than Jocasta, and reminds one of his behaviour before he married Wanda and then when Wonder Man first returned; on both occasions his feelings of inadequacy and artificiality arose from uncertainty about his relationship with Wanda. I know there isn't much evidence to support this theory, but it's a possibility.

Barry K. Winetrobe I find the news of BEM's proposed new format a bit of a mixed blessing. While it will be nice to see BEM typeset, and the prospect of an extra issue each year is welcome, the leap in price is rather a shocker. It only serves to confirm the recent divergence in the fan press between the Biggies and the Rest; the Biggies being BEM, Citizen Kelly's publishing empire, CU, and (probably) Panelologist, and the Rest being. . .well, the rest. The Biggies get bigger and/or glossier each month, some looking better than most British pro comics (or even items like Private Eye), and seem to hold a near monopoly of the fan press, leaving the smaller zines to scramble for the odd couple of hundred or so fans unable to afford them, or actually willing to buy more than one or two zines regularly. */(That sounds almost as though you're trying to blame lack of success onto the fact that there are better zines around. If there are four or five zines around, all offering similar contents, it's naive for a fan-ed to expect the fans to buy them all. The answer: make your zine stand out from the rest, either by superior contents (e.g. columns or articles which are more thoughtful or informative than the rest) or by superior production, the latter being much easier to achieve, but far less satisfying. I suppose the ultimate aim is to make your zine indispensable to the average fan, just like Bem is. But in any case, you can hardly blame Marty for trying to make his zine as professional-looking as possible, both to attract sales and for his own satisfaction, pride, ego or whatever you want to term it.)/*

As you, Mike, implied in reply to my last letter, zines like BEM can appear to fulfil almost all the functions of a fan publication/fan club. However, there are two dangers inherent in this concentration of fan production. **A:** Most of the smaller zines (except perhaps specialist or subsidised ones, e.g. COMIC REVIEW) will inevitably fold due to growing apathy of their staff, and the vicious circle of low circulation and high costs. **B:** There is the possibility that, like CMNI, Bem for example, will expand like a balloon, lose its "fannishness", and eventually burst due to the pressure. Of course, Martin may wish to emulate Richard and use his increasingly successful zine as a showcase for his talents for the pro-market scouts. That's perfectly understandable, but such a motivation can so easily lead to a drop in quality, as with recent issues of Comic Media News International. */(**A.** Zines fold because either their contents aren't good or different enough to attract a decent readership, or because the editor tires of publishing. To blame the failure on the apathy of fans seems somewhat of a conceit. **B:** I know it's tempting to compare Bem to CMN, but Marty and Richard are so different as individuals, and their zines will always reflect their different natures, that the comparison is definitely a misleading one. A zine with 6/8 pages of reduced-type letters will inevitably be fannish. If Marty wanted to impress pro-editors (and you're assuming that every fan wants to be in pro-comics; some don't, e.g. me) surely he would make Bem as good as possible, not allow it to decline. Besides, although the loss of Bem would be a tremendous blow to fandom now, I'm sure that in a couple of years time there'd be other zines more than ready to take its place.)/*

Let's hope that these new moves for Bem work out successfully, although I'd still prefer Bem "to continue in the same way as before". If it is to be that British fandom will be served by two tiers of zines, the ideal must be to have thriving, quality zines at **both** levels. As long as Martin doesn't overreach himself in this attempt to capture the CMNI market, Bem should establish itself as Britain's number 1 zine. Good luck. */(Barry, you seem to be trying to attribute ulterior motives to everything, coupled with your masterful use of the back-handed compliment. Bem is getting better for its own sake, not just to capture a supposed CMNI market. I agree about the 'thriving, quality zines at both levels'. A fanzine doesn't have to have typesetting or colour covers before it can be classed as successful. The old, stencil-duplicated zines were often a lot more fun, because they could be self-indulgent and very fannish, since they aimed at a smaller audience. What do you consider your aims and objectives, or functions even, with VERTIGO?)/*

Brian West As usual with the Eagle Awards voting form I've had to put "Pass" in one or two places. This isn't because I don't have a favourite, or think that all British artists and writers are foul. It is merely that as I don't save all the comics I buy (I buy nearly all the Marvel and DC lines, and a good number of 'sample' English ones), due to lack of storage space, I often cannot recall off-hand or check back in my collection to see who I should vote for. Especially as we are being asked to vote on things up to eighteen months old. I know this is not a new excuse, I've heard it several times before, but can I once again make a plea for assistance. Would it be completely

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unfeasible that one or two fanzines, and I'd prefer it to be Bem, could run in the month prior to the issuing of the ballot forms a column just reminding us of the material published in the period in question. It needn't be an 'opinion' column, in case you don't want to influence the votes, and it needn't include everything published, after all there must be quite a range of material which is so obviously too poor for inclusion that it could be omitted from such a column. I say I'd prefer it to be in Bem, because I can well imagine it taking the form of one of your 'Worlds of Emlock' columns, where after all you don't mention all the new material published, just the better stuff; albeit just in your opinion, but as a well respected (!!!) Big Name Fan you must at least be as well aware of current fandom trends and preferences as anyone. *//(I would have liked some memory-joggers too, but the person who provides such a listing will inevitably get accused of playing favourites, and of ignoring somebody's heroes. Perhaps fans could nominate anything they feel is worthwhile during the year, then Martin could tabulate and print the nominations just before Eagle time.)//*

The Mantlo interview in Bem-24 was excellent. Mantlo, although in many people's opinions perhaps not yet of the stature of Englehart et al., must surely be one of the most consistently competent and interesting writers working in comics today, and he's improving all the time. It won't be long before he does come up to the level of the aforementioned Steverino, if he ain't there already. His MICRONAUTS, working from the most puerile and ridiculous premise possible -- whoever heard of superhero toys — has surprised and delighted many erstwhile sceptical fans. Pity Moench can't do the same for the Hokum Warriors.

In Reaction there seems to be the implication that Martin Lock and Ed Sallis are one and the same. Forgive me if I'm naive, but excuse me because I'm,new to this game. Is it true that two of my favourite fan contributors, whose every word I hang on and devour avidly, are one person? I really have always respected Lock and Sallis and their judgement and comments, perhaps if they are the same person this explains why both of them seem to hold similar sensible views, and why I often concur with their pronouncements when I don't with anyone else. Well, well! Incidentally, which one is real? *//(I am.)//*

Simon Booth Thanks for Bem-24, an issue in which Bem strode manfully on to consolidate its position as Britain's leading zine with any pretensions to regularity. With type-setting it should become even more polished and professional-looking. Until now, though, Bem has always retained that friendly atmosphere that is difficult to pin down, but which is its main appeal. *//Relax, the friendly atmosphere will always be here -- BUT IF ANYONE ELSE MAKES ALLEGATIONS OF HAUGHTY PROFESSIONALISM, MARTY WILL BE CONTACTING THE SUPERSWIPE REVENGE SQUAD TO ANNIHILATE THEM!)//*

I hate having to say how wonderful you are, but the Bem interview with Bill Mantlo was about the perfect length for this kind of thing; space for detail without there being any risk of tedium. I was struck by Bill's apparent honesty not only concerning other people, but also when considering his own talents. His good words on Jim Shooter seem to be borne out by the evidence. So far Jim has, as far as I'm concerned, been doing a good job in that the attitude at Marvel seems to be a lot better now than it was, say, two or three years ago.

In my opinion, a comparison between the Marvel/DC products of 1969 and 1979 reveals little difference, essentially, in that there are still a few really worthwhile titles that stand out against the background of much that is mundane, pedestrian, or just plain bad. I'm not in a position to comment on the two Adams stories Chris Ash discusses, not having read them, but I take issue with him on his central point which is, if I understand it correctly, that comics because of something inherent in their form cannot be a vehicle for "serious artistic endeavour". I don't really have to cite any specific example to refute this; it is founded on decidedly untrue assumptions. Comics are a medium of communication, right? What they communicate are of course ideas; like all media, all art, they exist to transmit an image from one person's mind to another's. Whatever pretension to seriousness any piece of art may have depends on that image and on its originator's talent in expressing and communicating it; the medium used ought to be irrelevant. It may be that, in some people's opinion, there has never been "serious artistic endeavour" in comics -- but there is nothing in comics that makes this impossible.

Mike, you seem to **imply**, though maybe you didn't intend to, that you won't laugh at any joke you judge as being "offensive" to some minority or other, though how you propose to prevent yourself I don't know. Surely a joke being funny is not dependent on a sharing of the originator's political opinion, but on a vague 'chemistry' that cannot be evaluated in those terms. If you can laugh at yourself (most people, to their credit, can do so) you can laugh at your ideas, or find what someone else says funny in expression even if you despise its content. From what you've said, you probably don't agree -- I'd be interested to hear how you explain your opinion. *//(True, you can't help laughing at certain things, such as physical misfortune (e.g. banana slipping), at which you know you shouldn't be laughing, and perhaps feel ashamed later. Laughing at racist or minority jokes is something akin to that, plus the scorn I'd feel for any comedian who has to rely on such jokes for his laughs. Jasper Carrott, one of the funniest guys around at the moment, has never, to my knowledge, has to mock minorities to achieve his desired result.)//*

Like Ken Morris I too feared that Weirdworld would be very disappointing, but I hope he did take a look at it when it appeared, 'cos I didn't feel let down at all. Sure, it would have been nice to see the Ploog version, but Buscema has turned out quite possibly his very best work. Apparently some U.S. dealers felt the same as Ken when the switch was announced, withdrawing orders. I find this division between 'serious' 'cult' artists and 'competent professionals' something of a pity. Ken (and you Mike) also pronounces criticism on Craig Russell, specifically for his 'Parsifal'. I really cannot understand this. The art fulfils the criteria I might consider; it is very pretty to look at, and I can follow the story. The flat ornateness of the art was, I thought, quite effective in a story that incorporated a lot of symbolism. As for the story, well I admit the plot and some of the theological ideas implied were possibly *complex* -- okay, but what's wrong with that? What was it about the story that made it so "unreadable"? *//(Quite briefly, it was boring, and I thought the art was very weak, with poor figure work and clumsy inking.)//*

Stephen McGonagle My, wasn't that a short Bem? Took me less than half the usual time to read. And 15p more. I'm not really for the inclusion of strips in Bem, and definitely not to the extent of this issue. That being said, the two strips were relatively interesting. Martin's tale had one of those cutesy-pie endings which make me want to toss cookies; however, I declined my stomach's invitation and yet another Bem was saved from a messy end. Not to mention trousers, and various items of furniture. The story was quite good though, and laid a relatively sound foundation for subsequent issues to build on. Dave Harwood's art was a bit rough around the edges, reminding me in flavour of Alan Hunter's work. It was definitely not bad, but the style was not one I liked. Therefore I am beating around the bush like this, dithering, whether to pronounce it good or bad. I didn't like it but it was good for what it was. Will that do for a compromise? *//(In other words, does one rate a fan strip by fannish or pro standards?)//*

I found myself quite liking Eddie Campbell's 'The Big Hairspray Rumpus' -- which surprised me, as it contained certain facets in its makeup which generally send me diving for my Mary Whitehouse anti-smut repellant. I am not a prude (although when someone says that, you find they, generally, are trying to vindicate any assessment they make as being arrived at by a caring, hip (sic) human being), yet I found certain scenes in the strip somewhat lacking in taste. But therein does not lie the rub; what does annoy me is that the 'exploitation' (as I think I'll call it) of the lack of censorship was not necessary. The nudity (shock! horror!) was not an integral part of the story. The scene (page 6 panel 2) must only have been added for titillation. The strong language (page 7 panel 1) was also an unnecessary excess. Take both scenes out and the story could still have functioned unimpaired. *//(True, but I don't think the scenes were gratuitous. It's perfectly feasible for a woman to sleep nude (but I'm not giving away any secrets), and Pesky seems an unsavoury type who might say "arse", or even naughtier words.)//*

No doubt my whole argument may seem to you rather dumb, as your readership's age averages 22 years old. However, bear in mind that it *is* an average, and perhaps on this occasion you didn't show enough regard for your younger readers. The same argument could apply to Thundermole on page 2, methinks. *//(Do you really think that seeing a drawing of a naked lady or the word "arse", or reading a dirty joke will be damaging to a younger reader. If so, in what way?)//*

Bryan Talbot's cover of Mr. Arkwright was truly excellent.

I was pleased to hear of John Byrne's 'non' heart attack, although the very fact that he didn't suffer a minor heart attack casts a shadow over certain aspects of news reportage. As far as I can see, Byrne's heart attack was reported as fact by certain news sources, CMN! Update for one. This is not to say that I expect news reports to be infallible, with regards to cancellations, new mags, and so on, but the report of Byrne's heart attack was only a *rumour* -- and as such all that was needed to confirm it was a telephone call to someone in the know. Obviously noone took that trouble. Although it's not going to bring down the Conservative Government, it is rather irresponsible reporting.

As always, the letters column threw up a couple of interesting points, the most satisfying being Mike Cruden's utter and complete put-down of dealers charging different prices for the US and UK versions of the same mag. I believe the writer, Anthony Alexander, got more than he bargained for. I find the whole practise of collecting comics for profit distasteful. Although if there's suckers willing to pay dearer for the US copies, I'm not going to vilify Colin Campbell for catering for a need. And I don't suppose I feel *too* unkindly disposed towards the 'suckers' as, no doubt, obtaining the issues they desire brings them enjoyment. I wouldn't, however, have thought there'd be too great a market for such a practise.

I agree almost entirely with what Kenny Penman said about memories being rather too complimentary to the subject matter. I believe comics today, in certain ways, are as good as they were in the sixties (re: originality rather than technique); four years ago, with McGregor, Englehart and Gerber knocking about, I would have said better.

The most pleasant letter to appear in reaction this time was undoubtedly that of Michael O'Donoghue. I'm glad he wasn't put off from writing by Reaction's high standard, ex-Mastermind winner 'closed shop' type letters. I must admit there is a tendency to stand in awe, mouth agape at some of the letters published -- but if you feel you have something worthwhile to say, you just have to plug away! Like Michael I discovered fanzines via British Marvel, and for that I will always be grateful to them. On the subject of Dez Skinn publicising fanzines -- I don't think so. I think we've lost a fellow fan, and gained a pain in the neck.

In answer to your question, Mike, I believe the Lee/Ditko Spider-Man issues can stand against anything produced today. The 'Master Planner' isues of that magazine were classics, and are entertaining to discerning comic fans as well as the casual twelve year old reader.

I do not believe that so many people are blind. Re: The great X-Men 'Bem Readers Eagle Awards' heist. This is hero/cult worship at its worst. A lot of people who voted mustn't have looked any further than the X-Men. That is the only reason I can think of that would explain why the X-Men's creative team and characters fared so well, because there's better than the X-Men on sale. Much better. However, the categories are 'favourite' this and that, and not 'best'. Undoubtedly Claremont and Co have a lot of doting fans, but that doesn't necessarily make them best, the most talented.

I dislike the terminology used in the Eagle Awards. I'd prefer it if the term 'best' was stipulated, so that everyone knows where he/she stands. Then again, how does one gauge what is best? Through taste? Then that would be favouritism. . .oh to hell with it.

Mike Taylor The extensive inclusion of strips lessened the reading time considerably in Bem-25, and left me with a feeling that maybe there could have been more. Still, both strips were very good, and made a welcome change of pace from the usual Bem happenings. I trust that this new enlarged amount of strip material isn't permanent; it woud be hard to take along with the new price rise. *//(Nay, lad, 'tis just a sign of a summer special.)//*

Then to Reaction. Not enough pages this time, considering the in-depth approach of most of the letters. The column is easily the most interesting section. From the evidence presented in recent letter columns, not to mention certain comments overheard at conventions, it seems to me that certain fanzine readers are becoming as tired and sceptical of the fuss presently being made over the X-Men as I am. However, I foresee that the trend might, due to this, swing in the opposite direction. Gross fame tends to attract the critics amongst us, and faults start to appear. And appear. The faults present in comics largely slip the notice of the casual reader until more careful attention is paid. These critics should be careful not to then start slagging aforementioned book. I have already read one letter in a fanzine which accuses the X-Men of 'crap' stories. Statement: The X-Men is an excellent, entertaining comic. Statement: The X-Men is not as brilliant as some would have us believe, but seems to be because of the quality (or lack of it) of its fellow titles. Observation: the quality of some of the other comics is rising (e.g. Daredevil, Iron Man etc.), and fans are beginning to realise that the X-Men isn't so brilliant after all. Result: 'Let's slag the X-Men and cause controversy' time. (And who did that little sequence remind you of?) *//(Krypto?)//*

The current intercourse (verbal only, naturally) between Mike Cruden and Chris Ash is beginning to warm up, revealing some very interesting and disturbing aspects of comic fans. For instance, Chris says "I apologise for suggesting that you might read all the new DC's and Marvels" -- my god! Is snobbery running so high in fandom that people can be put down because they read comics? Stop me if I'm wrong, but isn't this comic fandom? Or has Mr. Ash decided to ascend to the 'higher plane' of the 'comics are crap' cultists? Presumably, if the answer is no, then he must be one of the 'I only read the best comics' people, but if you don't even read the things, how can you tell if they're good, bad or illiterate? *//(By a quick glance at the credits, or even a flick through the interior, if you manage to find anything other than ads.)//*

On the subject of pen-names, I would just say that I have never known this practise to be immorally deceptive, just a little confusing -- especially when I see someone at a convention wearing the name-badge of Ed Sallis when he looks remarkably like Martin Lock!

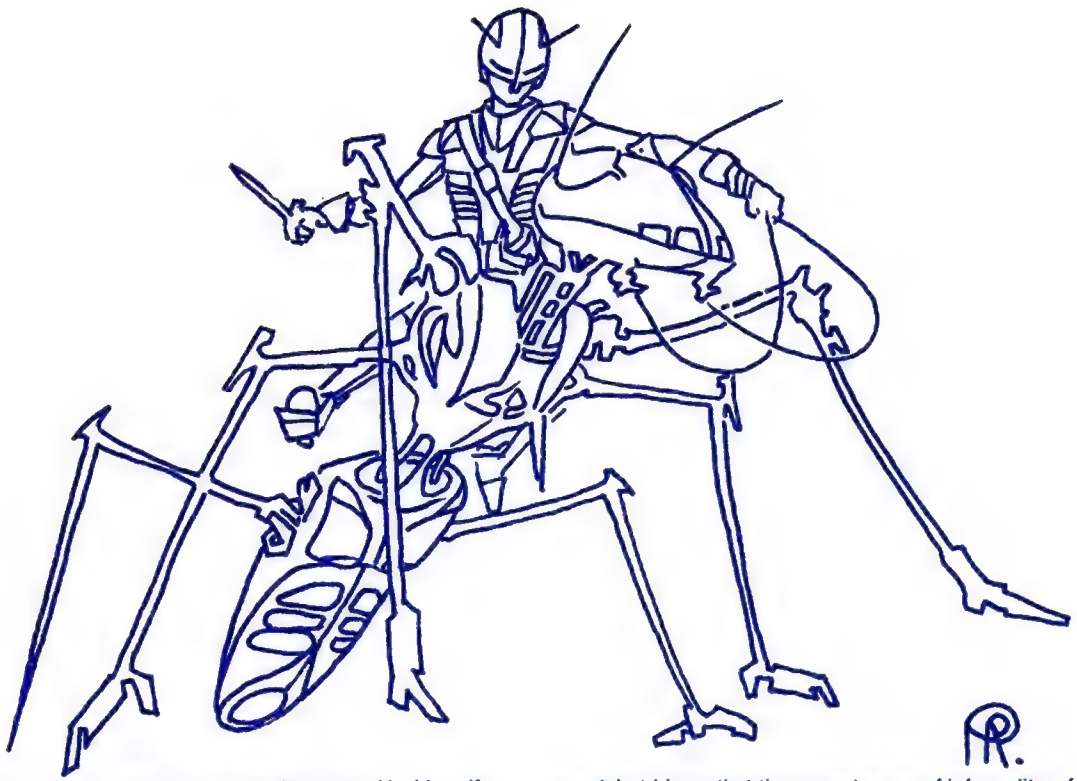
And finally, I'd add that Katholicity was refreshingly funny. Just the thing after a heavy (if short) lettercol.

John D. McKay After reading Anthony Alexander's letter in Bem-25, I was so annoyed that I wrote this letter on a subject that I (and I think many other fans) have been pondering for a long time.

Mr Alexander's attitude is so anti-fandom that I'm surprised he was brave enough to write to a fanzine. I despise the 'comics for investment' attitude, because it goes so much against the grain of Comic Fandom; that is, the enjoyment of comics for their entertainment and artistic value, with the mild excitement of collection and value as a bonus, and can only be a bad sign for the future of Fandom. (Don't misconstrue me -- I'm not against ND comics becoming reasonably more valuable than the equivalent price of the issue, had it been distributed -- say double -- but I am against the selling of both ND and American editions of a distributed comic at extortionate prices.)

It seems that Mr Alexander is obsessed with the value of his comics, and that the enjoyment of them is trivial compared to the potential capital gains to be made. I too buy comics I think may become valuable; I too enjoy the feeling that my collection is increasing in value. However, I do not go out of my way to make a profit, I do not keep an account book of how much I have gained ("Tomb of Draculas are up 5p an issue, heh heh!") and, as I have no intentions of selling my collection, the value of my comics will stay a 'feeling'. This may sound like an ego-trip session. It's not. I merely think I represent the 'average' fan.

Because he obviously has no interest in comics for themselves, I suggest that Mr Alexander move into



another, drier, higher profit making area. He himself mentioned stamps. I'm sure he could make all the money he wants as a philatelist, and retire rich without bothering anyone, as he is doing in Comic Fandom. As it is, he represents an (unfortunately) rising number of comicollectors whose avarice is pushing comic prices up, and out of the reach of the dedicated fan.

Mr Alexander said that he wouldn't pay Alan Austin's priceguide's prices. I'm not surprised. What he would like to see as a priceguide would be an up-to-the-minute tickertape Comic Edition of the Financial Times Shares Index. Alan Austin's guide does not pander to people like Mr Alexander; it is honest and true to Fandom, endeavouring to stabilize prices rather than push them up.

And do you know the exasperating thing about this whole business? Fandom and fans may rant and rave about mercenaries like Mr. Alexander, but it will never get anywhere against them because it is SO DISORGANISED, and each individual fan thinks, "Well, I'm not going to go it alone and sacrifice the value of my comics if no else is." People react to big noises and strong, definite moves, not vague recommendations and "But then again"s. It is high time we did something about Capitalist Creeps (no, I'm not a Communist) and Avaricious Dealers. No, of course we can't use force. . .it's a free country after all. . .but we can squeeze the Capitalists from their trendsetting positions of power, and force extortionate dealers to lower their prices.

All we need to do is stop buying comics from dealers who insist on charging ridiculously high prices for ND and American back issues, on the excuse of 'comics for investment'. It's not so hard, and it saves you money too, which, in the end, means more comics for your money, if you buy from smaller, less profit-orientated dealers. In this way dealers can be forced to lower their prices, as long as they are told why their profits are falling. I shall be pleased to discuss plans of action, through correspondence, with any fans who wish to do so.

Fanzines can help. By deriding (fairly) letters from this type of fan, we can encourage the silent majority to make a move. By simple not printing such letters the voice of the profit-makers can be stifled, though the ethics of this action might be called to question. However you look at it, there is no changing the basic fact: the silent majority of fandom are the true weight of any movement. Make them move positively, and the battle is won. The time for definite changes in Fandom has come. If we don't move now, it will reach the stage where people coming into the world of comicollecting will be attracted merely by the money to be made. We must topple these nerds from their positions of power. Anyway, whether you agree with the finer points of my argument or not, wouldn't you like to see Fandom as a closer-knit body, and actually going somewhere?

I'm serious. Speaking as a small fan, I urge the small and big fans to join together and let nothing and nobody stand in the way of a better Fandom. Please write to me if you agree; I know I am not alone in Fandom.

I must also stress that I am not a dealer, and stand to gain nothing (more than anyone else) financially from the pushing into the background of avaricious dealers and fans. */(All fine sentiments, but tremendously difficult to put into action. I don't think the censoring of pro-investment letters is condonable; you've just got to argue them away, as you say. Blacking certain dealers would also prove very difficult; there'll always be somebody desperate enough to pay over the odds for what he wants. How about revealing your plans of action to fandom at large, via Bem.)/*

Kevin Trundley With Bem getting larger and better and slicker and more professional, as it certainly is, will it remain a fanzine -- a magazine "for the fans, by the fans"? Or is the next step 'Bem the Comic News Fanzine International' (or BICNFI!), followed closely by Martin Lock's mysterious disappearance for professional pastures, and ... well, you've heard it all before.

No, there's no stopping Bem's progress now, which is good, but I hope that the current sense of informality, of 'fannish activity' (arguments and controversy between fans in Reaction, an informative review column on the latest fanzines and associated fan ventures, and a liberal sprinkling of enthusiastic fan art) will not be forfeited in favour of establishing a more professional 'zine which will attract more fans.

Please to understand, sir: I think it's a great idea to get as many people aware of (and so involved in) fandom as possible, but if Bem's methods of going about this are by limiting all artistic contributions to neo-professionals or those of a professional quality (and thus depriving newer fans -- like **me** for example - of an opportunity of having their ventures published), or having all letters and articles written purely by the big name fans, then these methods fail somehow.

I just hope that the 'new, bigger Bem' currently in metamorphosis will not dissuade anyone from becoming **involved** with fandom, rather than just being aware of it. I would like to see Bem more actively encouraging contributions from all corners of fandom. Just reassure us, the worried, newer fans, that the changes in Bem won't produce so high a standard as to deter any new fan -- like myself -- from making a contribution. After all, it's on such contributions that a fanzine thrives, isn't it? */Any answer I make is going to sound awfully snobbish. Martin wants Bem to look as good and read as well as possible, yes? This, unfortunately, is not compatable with publishing art and articles by neo-fans, who, after all, have ample opportunities in other, less well established and less expensively produced zines. Bluntly, it's pointless spending a fortune on the lavish production of poor quality work. Besides, there's always Reaction, wherein any old rubbish appears.)/*

Martin Longley Having just finished reading the latest Bem, I can't decide what to think about the (almost) 50% strip content. In theory it's a great idea and is surely what should be a major goal of Bem -- to produce its own comics work, as well as being an organ of discussion about other people's comics. **But,** there are several reasons why it didn't quite work out this time. Consider: Bem has, probably, very few editorial constraints regarding what is suitable for publication -- why then are both of the major strips in this issue more simplistic and unadventurous than the average IPC strip? Many people complain about the commercialised 'will it sell?' attitude of mainstream comics so why, given the opportunity, do Harwood, Campbell, and **you,** Martin persist in churning out stuff which is more 'commercial' than the stuff in 2000 A.D.? Don't misinterpret me -- wait, let's look at this rationally. I'm not advocating mass employment of naughty words, bums, tits, clits and gore in order to,justify a comic as being 'adult', but I **do** think that something a bit more complex, unusual and therefore interesting should be included in future. I mean, Thundermole is an example of what should be in Bem -- there are no rules to this strip .. no plot ... no characterisation ... no humour ... no sex ...

That's **good.**

On the other hand, the (don't you butt in here, Cruden, I'm going to say what you're going to before you do ...) logical argument is that if given more artistic freedom than mainstream comics people **want** to do this sort of strip, then why not -- there's a place for all types in the pages of Bem. Perhaps I'm just being a critical bastard. In fact, yes, that's my conclusion. I take back all I said about the two strips. Given artistic freedom people can do what they want -- and they (and you) wanted to do 'that'. That's okay. What I should have said was that I, personally, didn't get much out of them. And that's the end of that ... (heh, heh) */(Heh, heh indeed. People have the freedom (artistic?) to draw any old rubbish, but that doesn't mean it deserves to see print. I agree completely that it's pointless to serve up a rejected version of what can be found in 2000 A.D. With the collapse of many u/g mags, Bem could now be the place to showcase some of their former talent. Campbell's strip was a step in the right direction, but what happened to the potential shown in Beem, or, for that matter, in RDH Comics?)/*

Kathleen Glancy Thanks for Bem 25. As I go on holiday tomorrow, I haven't really time even for a proper LoC, just a few brief notes. Ivo J. is a chauvinist pig. I am a high-ranking Civil Servant. I am. Well, my title is Higher Executive Officer. I work on Student's Awards. If you are going to print that, please emphasise that it is not in the **least** use writing to me and asking how to fiddle more grant, being that it all comes out of my income tax and yours I won't part with a penny more than a student's legal entitlement. */(Quite rightly, too.)/*

Bem-25: So, Dr Who is getting his own Marvel mag. (It wasn't just a typo, was it?) With his increasing popularity in the USA, I'm not surprised really. I wonder if they'd buy Blake's 7. */(DR WHO WEEKLY is a Marvel U.K. comic, which will probably be reprinted in the States. Logical, as the TV series is now being shown over there.)/*

I like the strips. 'Planet Tale' was wild, and I look forward to 'Inside Story'. And Cliff was hilarious, rude bits and all.

God, it's incredible -- there is a subject on which Mike Cruden and I agree 100%. That's 1984. He spoke for both of us in what he said about that load of schoolboy **(primary** schoolboy at that) smut. I wonder how he feels about the last pages of HOWARD THE DUCK? MAGAZINE 1. I myself found the main fault was not in its being 'unnatural' or 'perverted', but simply in the total lack of credibility, going well past the point where you can suspend disbelief. Now hear this, folks. A **man** could get sexual relief from an encounter with a duck of either sex, though the duck couldn't enjoy it much. (I can recall reading, about 15 years ago, about a man who got prosecuted by the RSPCA for having relations with some sort of fowl) For a **woman** intercourse with a drake is physically impossible. The sheer absurdity of the dialogue (I mean, "Kiss me, Howard". Really, how can a creature who doesn't have lips kiss anyone?) and situation goes too far. The whole point of good farce is that it should be rooted firmly in reality, and played straight. */I haven't yet got a Howard Magazine, but the copy I leafed through at the Comicon practically fell open at the page. Perhaps Bev grooves on fowl oral sex, or perhaps Howard gave her a hand. Are you really going to print this, Martin?)/.*

Phil, bovine excrement it may have been (Conan 100, in case anyone's forgotten), but let's put the blame where it belongs. It's **Howard's** bullshit, not Thomas'. Aside that Thomas made Belit a little more sympathetic than Howard did, it was a very faithful adaptation. Where Thomas went wrong was in not having it about a year sooner -- Belit was a very boring character, and we'd all had a Belit-full of her long before she died.

I categorically deny that I am anyone but me. I only have one name, that which is known and praised by approximately half of you and to hell with the other half. I haven't even a middle name. I feel rather deprived, as everyone else has three names at least, but there it is. I am Kathleen Glancy, and generally proud of it. */(And so you should be, Nige ... er, I mean, Kath!)/*

Brief responses on Bem-24. Kenny Pseudonym - honestly now, do you **really** think Moondragon's actions were moral by our present codes? Quicksilver had not committed any crime -- all he did was to make himself obnoxious to all about him and distress his sister. There are a vast number of people like that about. Suppose, for instance, the Government decreed that all members of the Orange Order, because **they** are bigots who make themselves obnoxious to most of the people about them and distress their moderate relations, those whose relations aren't Orange themselves, must be taken in and lobotomised. Do you think the general public would be **pleased** that a band of men who had done no more than express a biased view of life should be forced to conform to a more moderate line? Do you not think there would, instead, be a riot led by those who totally disagree with the Orange Order's views but are prepared to defend their right to express them? If you take the former view, I can only say we don't seem to live in the same world.

Mike -- I **did** point out that Nightcrawler could have disposed of the guard just as quietly and quickly, **without** killing him. Moreover, I dispute the necessity for quiet. The guard was poorly placed -- there was nobody in earshot of him -- **and,** it strikes me, Wolverine with his super-senses should have known there wasn't. Maybe he did, but just felt like killing someone. You can't really compare all these German and Japanese guards -- they are men who, if it wasn't for the extreme carelessness they are all afflicted with by the needs of the script, would have an even chance against their assailants -- better than even really, they're usually better armed. But for a superpowered mutant to kill a normal human is like a normal human adult male finishing off a child or an old and feeble man, who is in any case no real danger to him because they meet a mile away from the enemy forces, so all he need do is effect a K.O. and go on his way -- even if the child or old man was daft enough to give chase, the adult male can run much faster, and in any case is going to draw attention to himself by attacking when he gets near where he's going. */(Read my answer to Peter Poole's letter, and I can add that Chris intended the guard to be much closer, critically close in fact, to the people inside, so that his silent disposal was essential, but, in view of Chris' other remarks, perhaps you're right. Perhaps he saw an ideal opportunity to give vent to his murderous compulsions. Are you impressed, Mat Coward?)/*

I am inclined to think Mr Smith, or Windsor-Smith as he now calls himself, the snobbish creature, noticed that Roy Thomas had made a little bloomer in his dialogue, but deliberately refrained from saying anything until it was on the shelves. **Then** he told him, laughing fiendishly the

while Someone told Roy -- the offending term was changed to 'Wonk' in theTreasury reprint. Jack Vance had a similar problem with an SF book called "Servants of the Wankh", which got distribution in a lot of bookshops that don't usually stock SF. One wonders what any customers buying it thought of it, since Mrs Whitehouse could not object to its morality.

Pete Martin Mike, I can't accept your contention (in reply to Chris Ash's letter in Bem-24) that any work which deals with themes of violence may be categorized as (Serious) Art or not depending on the motives of its creator. Violence, physical or emotional, exists only on its own terms, whether it is presented by Neal Adams, Albert Camus, Pauline Reage or 2000 A.D. *//(Surely the violence exists with its framework, and the framework can reveal the purpose of the violence: e.g. Kung Fu films, where the violence is for vicarious thrills, or Anti-War films, where the violence is for the moral education of the viewer. Violence presented by Jack Kirby is much more likely to be an end itself, than if it were presented by Albert Camus, when it would likely be a means to an end (the end probably being instructional.)//*

Judging a work on the strength of its intentions would only be valid if it was sufficiently unambiguous that the intentions were perceptible to all readers in a similar manner. The divergence of your and Chris's views shows that such was not the case with the Adams stories. Furthermore, I've known of people who could react with disgust at the contents of 2000 A.D. while another regarded the passionless killer of 'The Outsider' as a comical figure. I feel, then, that an objective classification of art/Art is unrealistic owing to the wealth of subjective viewpoints available. The worth of any work is ultimately dependent on the perceptions of the reader. For instance, 'The Story of 0' has had claims (inexplicable, I grant) of Artistic Merit made on its behalf, but to anyone receptive to such ideas, its romanticization of the Submissive Female would have exactly the same appeal as any hack-work bondage-orientated Spiderwoman cover. (In passing: S-W is still being published. Ms Marvel was cancelled. Comics' most successful heroine, Wonder Woman, loses her strength when bound by a man. Am I reading too much into this? Off my back, Wertham!) Similarly, 'Last Exit to Brooklyn', the only book ever to literally sicken me (a Good Thing) could easily be for some the same source of gratuitous thrills as Mack Bolan, The Executioner, or Marvel's Punisher. *//(The argument that all art is subjective is possibly true, but leads to a dead end -- therefore nobody can discuss it. Discussion is only possible if you concede that because we all share a fairly similar frame of reference (even if it's only of a Western Industrialised society), our values are going to be similar, and therefore objective criticism is valid.)//*

The key element of the treatment of violence, in any medium, should be the extent to which the reader experiences the pain of the victim. This creates difficulties of presentation which I don't think can be fully surmounted. A dispassionate viewpoint on the part of the writer has the effect of distancing the reader from immediacy of pain, reducing acts of brutality to sterile mechanical choreography. Conversely, a committed writer, who uses graphic desciptions to amplify emotional intensity, runs the risk of promoting identification with the aggressor; a danger which is worsened in comics by the ease with which the accompanying artwork can easily be construed as 'gloating' -- remember how Chris's views on 'Thrillkill' differed from your own, Mike? *//(Don McGregor used very graphic descriptions of violence in "Panther's Rage", but I'm sure nobody identified with Killmonger. Perhaps the important distinction is the viewpoint; if McGregor had written what Killmonger did, instead of what the Panther felt, the point of the violence could well have been vicarious instead of cathartic.)//* It must also be remembered that most comics fans were first attracted to the medium in childhood by the voyeuristic fascination of fantasy violence. For many, it would be easy to accept an escalation in the intensity of conflict while making the wrong emotional connections. The solution to the dilemma; I haven't got one. If I knew how to portray violence honestly yet meaningfully, I'd be writing Artistic comics instead of working in this crummy factory. *//(I'd have thought that violence was only one of several factors attracting children to comics, the others being colourful characters and exciting adventures. The most popular comics character ever, Captain Marvel, was particularly un-violent.)//*

A final point; I'm still not convinced that the anti-war story has any value at all. If anyone's sensibilities are sufficiently developed as to be repelled by the depiction, then they obviously already accept the moral basis of the work and are unlikely to gain any new insights. Alternatively, anyone who draws vicarious pleasure from any brutal work is not likely to have their opinions changed by anything less than a severe thrashing (cynical cop-out). Do morality parables really have any purpose other than to give readers a chance to congratulate them on their sensitivity and moral fortitude? *//(Preaching to the converted is always a danger, but an unavoidable one, since the alternative is not preaching at all. Regarding the Neal Adams anti-Viet Nam story, isn't it possible that just one person changed from being a committed hawk to a doubtful dove, perhaps even through encountering the fact that innocent children were being killed in a particularly nasty way?//*

New paragraph. Memo to Ken Moore: "Am I Too Old For Comics" is not worth bothering about. I know I'm too old, but I still read the things anyway. As long as I can still find time for Samuel R. Delany, Bill Kotzwinkle, Sylvia Plath and Alan Coren (Alan Coren??), I'll continue to read any other rubbish I can lay my hands on. After all, I don't believe in Art, anyway. Ignorance is bliss.

Cat Yronwode Yes, John Lindley, I am a female human (and if you won't give the man a no-prize, allow me to send him one by surface mail. Look for it soon, John!). Heh heh heh Roger Lyon, you can't fool ME with that pen-name! **I know** you are really a woman because your writing is so, shall I say ... feminine?

Kathleen: as far as I know, the word 'wank' has **no** meaning, racial or otherwise, in American slang. I agree with Mike that Mr. Windsor-Smith was just having a bit of fun by, shall we say ... inserting it? And you are right about 'poof'. That is simply a sound effect in American, nothing more. Although I too formed the same opinion about Michael Golden, based on that Bat-Mite story. But now I read, in an interview with Golden in the St. Louis-based fanzine, Whizzards, that Golden loves his wife and his dog. So you see, unless he is married to his dog, he turns out to be a very normal guy who only comes across as slightly, shall I say ... feminine? *//(I would hazard a guess that the majority of comic fans feel more comfortable with an effeminate than with a maccho, beer-swilling, chain-smoking Aussie-type male, so your description of Mike as slightly feminine is possibly more complimentary than derogatory, not that you necessarily meant it as a negative comment (but it sounded like it.))//*

Bem-24 was a very interesting & pretty zine. As usual, I really enjoy the coloured inks. Thundermole was quite amusing, and I also enjoyed the Eisner illo on page 18. Whoever did it signed it with a representation of one of Eisner's most often-renamed characters, Algernon Tidewater, a.k.a. Kilroy, a.k.a. P.S. Smith, a.k.a. The Unknown Terror. Were any of these names meant to be a play on the artist's real name? DO any British fans have real names? Is everyone in the U.K. a pseudonym for Martin Lock? Dean Smith told me, in a personal letter, that there are only "two or three women" in British fandom. Is this TRUE, or is Mr. Smith nearsighted? Are all of them pen names for Martin Lock? What the HELL is going on over there? *//(Between male and female fans ... not a lot. Perhaps the most useful ballot would be one which contained two questions : (1) Are you female, (2) What's your phone number. The paucity of females in fandom was never felt more than at the Comicon '79 Friday night disco. Perhaps the fancy dress ought to have been compulsory drag.)//*

But then, come to think of it, with letters from the like of Roger Lyon gracing the pages of Bem, I can see why women stay away in droves.

It looks like you have your troubles with horrendously rip-off inclined dealers too. It **can't** be as bad as here, though. It just **can't.** The other day a dealer told me to my face that he "hates Overstreet's Price Guide." I agreed with him, it's an inflationary tool of the running-dogs of capitalism. Oh no! **That's** not why he hates it! He hates it "because the prices are too LOW, and some of my customers won't buy for over Price Guide prices!" This man also makes a practise of scribbling 25c in indelible marker all over the covers of any comics which grade out at "good" or lower, thus insuring that you cannot buy a "good" copy of any title at his store. The store is 'Clint's Comics'; caveat emptor. Luckily for Kansas City comics fans there is another source for used comics (no new ones) less than one block from this rip-off emporium. **They** sell near-mint through poor comics, unsorted by title or genre, for 20 cents each, in addition to having semi-sorted boxes for most superhero titles priced considerably UNDER Overstreet. The unsorted stuff often duplicates the sorted stuff at half the price, and if you can keep on top of it, you actually pick up near-mint copies of the current month's titles for half the cover price! The trouble is that 'Clint's' advertises in all Marvel comics and in major national fanzines while Westport Books (the Good Guys) are only known by word of mouth, being primarily a used book store. Is there justice in this world? Will the owner of 'Clint's' choke on his next bank deposit? Will The Hulk step on his head? Stay tuned for further exciting updates from across the sea!!!

Oops! I just noticed the art credits on page 25. I **knew** the artist wasn't named Algernon; and Kilroy didn't sound like anybody I'd ever heard of before either. Is Pete Scott a pen name for Martin Lock too?

Peter J. Poole I see that Ms Glancy's letters in Reaction continue to show her low opinion of Wolverine, comicdom's answer to Dirty Harry. Now I'm a Logan fan from way back, so I guess that's a basic difference of viewpoint that cannot be overcome -- but consider this, the killing of that sentry took place in the Savage Land, where live and let die is a natural part of things. The same scene set in New York, say, would have had a vastly different impact; as Mike's wartime analogy so aptly points out, circumstances and location **do** alter cases. *//(According to Chris (who "held court" numerous times over the Comicon weekend; he's easily the friendliest, most approachable pro I've met), he didn't write that scene as it appeared. He left it ambiguous how Wolverine disposed of the guard, permanently or temporarily. This may be because Byrne puts in a lot of the detail of the stories (example: look at how Nightcrawler was captured in the first Arcade instalment; for that incident Chris wrote something to the effect of "Nightcrawler got captured"). Chris also said that Wolverine was a certified psychopath, and only now is he controlling his impulse to kill people whenever he loses control, which is often. So, Kath, perhaps we're both right; Wolverine was a psychopath, but is no longer.)//*

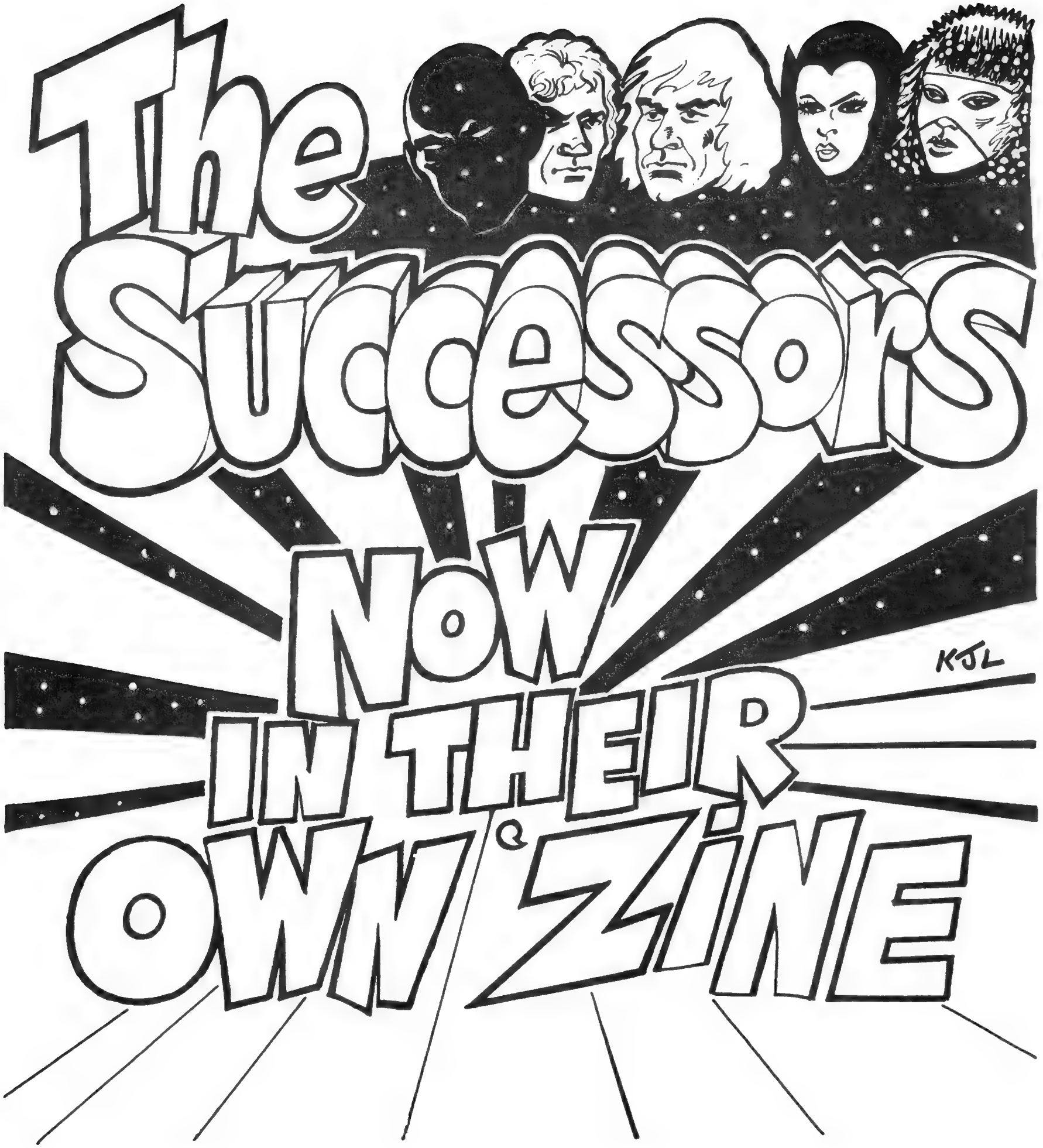
Incidentally, Mike's 'lurid' mention of Wanda and the Vision leads me nicely on to one thing that I do want to mention, one line in Avengers 188 that is mind-blowing in its implications, but could well become part of the silliest 'personal crisis subplot' yet:-

Crystal has just told Pietro she's pregnant -- nice to know he does have some uses -- and Wanda wanders off for a quick brood on her maternal instincts: "I am a mutant ... my husband ... an android ... Could we have children? ... Dare we even try?" Now it has long been established that the Vision is constructed of synthetic materials, and in an earlier issue (99 I **think**) he is talking to Jarvis and saying that there are things he could never offer Wanda, one of these being a family. Setting aside the factor that Wanda is not necessarily ready for motherhoood, and seems happy enough, even complacent, to continue as is, there is one line in that quote that has ... overtones.

I'm trying hard to be delicate about what is basically my prurient prying into a married couple's sex life, but ... "Dare we even try?" There are only two possibilities here, either their marriage was never consumated, which seems unlikely, or they have taken steps to prevent conception, which seems absurd. The only way that I believe they can raise a family is through adoption, which could prove difficult considering their lifestyles and that they are not legally married. The service was performed by Immortus, neither a church nor civic dignitary, who has since removed all traces of his lengthy existence -- tell that to City Hall! My hope is that Wanda will think things through and realize that she doesn't want a family -- anything else is probably going to seem awfully contrived. *//(I'm relieved you didn't say artificial. But, I think your first possibility is*

the most likely. Wanda has never evinced a particularly high sex-drive, her costume used to be dramatic rather than sexy, so it could be completely the Vision's mind which is the attraction (that she should be attracted by a machine must say something about her sexuality). Secondly, would Ultron equip the Vision with functioning sexual apparatus. Perhaps as a sick, grim joke, or perhaps so the Vision's genetic code could be passed on, as a self-producing machine. If Ultron is brilliant enough to enable the Vision to think quickly enough to cope with adversaries, to alter his density and mass, and to emit energy beams, then the small matter of copying the human reproduction system should not have been out of his reach. The question is, what would be the result of a mixture of Wanda's and the Vision's genetic codes, if they were able to mix.)

Gordon Smith I feel Chris Ash puts his finger on the reason why I and others can feel uncomfortable when writing to you, Mike -- we have no chance to reply to your comments and rhetorical queries until the next issue, when no-one cares or they've forgotten about it, whereas you have no such wait. Also your comments often interrupt the flow of an argument. When you do this, you stop the (hopefully) logical progression of the point the writer is trying to make, thereby rendering his/her comments, in part, less effective. You can pick holes in a person's letter immediately; however we cannot do the same to your comments, therefore you have the advantage. In trying to "evolve some meaningful discussion", you do "score points" off us, but there's nothing wrong with that. To put your view of something and (try to) find inconsistencies in another's viewpoint is an integral part of discussions/arguments and, ultimately, dialogue; BUT Reaction is not proper "Dialogue", as you say, and certainly not the same as face-to-face confrontation.



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(Stating that no-one cares about, or has forgotten the topics of a previous Reaction denotes a somewhat unflattering view of fandom).

One great virtue of print over the spoken word (whether real or on film) is that one can backtrack and review the argument. An advantage of placing my replies immediately after the points I'm replying to is that it avoids this space-wasting and tedious paragraphing, and it is more readily intelligible. It does not necessarily give me any sort of "advantage" (to do what, I wonder), since the time available for you to construct your arguments, rebuttals or whatever is much greater than that which I have.

Of course, Reaction isn't the same as face-to-face confrontation, but until Bem becomes the first video-comm fanzine, I think my answering method is the closest thing we can get to a dialogue.

M.C. sitting in his chair, cackling and chortling with glee every time he adds another point to his score in the great on-going match of Mikeman versus The Rest of Fandom may be your view of reality. Mine is that I try to provoke rational and critical (in the appraisal, not the negative, sense) discussion about comics and anything related. I could be fooling myself, but I don't think so.)/

Right, off the soapbox. I don't understand how Pete Scott can go overboard with CE3K, which is a simplistic approach to a fascinating subject, where everything plays second fiddle to the special effects. God knows how he'd react to the novel, "The Mote in God's Eye" by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, an intelligent and fully-rounded story about "first contact'.

Just as I begin to get enthusiastic about the British comics scene again, after the demise of the brilliant Starlord, I learn from a sickeningly reliable source that the promising Tornado mag is to be "merged" with "2000 A.D. + Starlord". It really does seem to me that the Renaissance of British comics is in its death-throes. */(Don't write I.P.C. off yet -- there are certainly enough interested talented people there to come back with something good, and given that SF and fantasy is still "hot", and that I.P.C. have some pretty large printing presses to keep occupied, another title to fandom's taste can only be a matter of time. Er ... Don't blame me for butting in like this, Gordon old buddy, Mike ordered me to! -ML)/*

Bem 24 was another interesting and well-balanced issue and, if there's any Real Ale at the Comicon, I shall certainly buy him a pint. /(Which him?)/ /(Well, it wasn't me -- but I don't think CAMRA would approve of the Hotel Metropole, anyway ...-ML)/

And can I be the first to say I don't understand Geoff Lamprey's letter? */(Yes.)/*

David Jackson In Bem-24's Reaction, Harry McAvinchey made the legitimate complaint that some of his fanzine illustrations have spent the past three years in an editor's possession without ever seeing print. Harry's experience in this respect is the same as my own, and I endorse all his comments 100%. I have several pieces of fanzine artwork dated from 1976 which remain unpublished; some have since been returned to my possession, others are still at large. Had I known in advance that the drawings were to remain in limbo, obviously there would have been no incentive to submit them.

Harry also questions the fate of the proposed Frank Bellamy checklist. I understand that some London fans intended publishing a list of Frank's work quite separately from my own attempt to compile as complete a catalogue as possible. All the information which I assembled was to have been available for a Frank Bellamy book proposed by Roger Dean, but this project never materialised. Although I have amassed a considerable amount of information, I regard the checklist as being far from complete, particularly in regard to Frank's earlier and more obscure pieces. Naturally I would be happy to hear from, and exchange information with, anyone who thinks that they may be able to help.

Mat Coward Wow! So suddenly I'm changing people's views (at a stroke!). You're quite right, of course, that is exactly what locing is all about (providing, as you say, we can step off our ego trips), but I wonder how often it actually happens? I don't think I can ever remember having my mind changed, or even made up, by anything I've read in a loc. But maybe that's just because I'm pig-headed. The same goes for other communications, too -- I have a theory (which I imagine half a dozen professional hacks have already written best-sellars on the basis of: and if they haven't they have no right to call themselves hacks), and my theory is, this is my theory eh-hem -- that when you're having an argument/debate with someone, you don't actually hear at least 90% of what they say, let alone allow it to change your already formulated views at all. You hear the first sentence the other person says, in order to tell if he's agreeing with you or arguing with you; then you spend the rest of the time that he's talking working out your reply. You also hear the last few words, so that you can pick them apart. So consider yourself, Mike, an innovator in the field of human interpersonal relations! (I wonder what that means?) */(When two persons argue about anything, they will usually take the argument personally and defend their point of view more through ego than through rationale. However, later, in private, they may consider the argument and integrate any truths it may contain with their own views. It's the old thesis-antithesis-synthesis formula. Fannish arguments are sometimes more dogmatic because the views are in print, and therefore permanent, so it takes a positive overpowering of the ego to acknowledge a defeat.)/*

Bem-24 I enjoyed very much; I even found Katholicity funny, for the first time ever. People are always laying into fan fiction, but I think formalised fan humour is our weakest point. I was sorry to see that Unamerican Activities was to be dropped */(now continuing under new management!-ML)/*; I very much hope that you'll continue to give plenty of space to panelological matters outside of the mainstream. Thundermole was great, and Ultraman shows, um, promise? The interview was interesting, very revealing; and of course Reaction was as usual the highspot. About the Comicon being in Brum; this will prevent me going, certainly, but it is undeniably fairer to hold it in a more central location than London, as fans seem pretty widely distributed, geographically. */(The attendance at Comicon '79 seemed roughly similar to last year's, though I think the table fees put some of the dealers off. The National Exhibition Centre's Metropole Hotel was a very plush locale, which lent Comicon a great deal of prestige, but the prices of food and drink were somewhat daunting for the younger and less affluent member of fandom. However, the number of rooms available did allow for a wider range of talks and activities. Perhaps Colin Campbell will divulge some details about the event, attendance figures, economic success, etc?)*

D.R. Soulsby I enjoyed the Bill Mantlo interview in Bem-24, although it took a long time to get around to talking about the best Marvel comic around at present; Bill Mantlo mentioned that he had scripted the first twelve issues right through from the start, and this certainly is apparent from the structure and development of the plot. Too often lately from Marvel we have had a storyline which seems to change drastically from issue to issue, with new writers throwing continuity and sub-plots to the winds -- DOCTOR STRANGE in particular has suffered from this. I was not impressed to learn that Howard Chaykin is to take over the art from Mike Golden, albeit only for 5 issues -- I remember his work on 'Monark Starstalker' and 'The Mark of Kane'. Ecchh! */(I thought his work on these was okay, but he really hacked his STAR WARS. In fact, I've only been completely enthusiastic about a few of his stories, such as The Scorpion. Regarding abrupt changes of plot, the most outstanding example must be SKULL, wherein three of the protagonists were killed off by Englehart, only to be later revived by Mantlo. That title was one of the most confusing, directionless comics I've ever read.)/*

Have other collectors experienced deteriorating conditions on the distributed Marvel 'all colour comics' from local newsagents recently? */Yes.)/* The condition of most of this month's and last month's titles was absolutely disgusting. Covers were bent and creased in three of our local newsagents; when I pointed this out to the proprietor of one of these shops his attitude was obviously "well, they're only comics". No other magazines in these shops are ever offered for sale in anything other than mint condition. I have decided to buy advance imports for 25p from reputable dealers rather than 12p (going up to 15p) from the local "comics are trash" newsagent. It's funny how the titles one gets for 12p always seem inferior to the N.D. titles anyway!

Dave Harwood Very nice cover. Did you know that the act of walking directly towards -- or away from -- the viewer is regarded as one of the most difficult figure poses to draw? Someone once made a highly-acclaimed animation film based on this seemingly simple idea. Since it's a pose I have difficulty with myself, and hence avoid whenever possible, it was almost encouraging to note that a talented artist like Bryan Talbot didn't get it right either. The colour overlays were excellent however, and the piece as a whole was really quite striking.

Typesetting does improve the clarity and presentation of the text; that should be of particular benefit to the Comics News pages, which have always seemed a little cluttered. And I wonder if it's significant that I find this section one of the least interesting parts of Bem these days. Incidentally, in the one-upmanship stakes, now that GS5 has finally appeared, type-set throughout and on glossy, heavy stock paper too, are you going to be tempted to jump on the bandwagon? It might be nice to see, but I don't think it's necessary.

Actually there isn't an awful lot in Bem-25 I can legitimately comment on, though I did consider writing in under a pseudonym (Chris Ash, maybe?) to say how brilliant the strips were ... but I won't. In case your readers take to Cliff, I should point out that the likelihood of further adventures is virtually nil. Eddie's comic strip preoccupations have moved far away from this kind of fantasy; indeed, he's practically given up drawing, but if/when he gets back into the swing I'm sure he would regard this type of story very much as a retrograde step. It might also be worth pointing out that over a year separates the two strips, in case anyone noticed that the inking on Planet Tale was a touch more sophisticated than on Cliff.

The Eagle Awards, Bem version: I didn't vote this year -- I couldn't find the necessary enthusiasm, and I'm not greatly enamoured by the whole idea anyway. So I'll make no comment, except to say how nice it was **not** to see Neal Adams in the favourite artist section.

Katholicity: Whether or not Kath has been noting lettercol criticisms of past columns, I must say that over the last few issues she's **really** been steaming (er, if you see what I mean). This has become a gem of a feature, utterly individual, and Kath's writing style continues to grow in confidence.

Which just leaves Reaction.

It's interesting to note that the pleasing appearance of new names in Reaction also coincides with the absence of several erstwhile 'regulars' -- coincidence, or deliberate policy? Either way it's by no means a bad thing; the more people who can be persuaded to write in the better. Fandom can always use new blood, in fact it continually **needs** it, especially since 'established' fans have a habit of suddenly disappearing from the scene, either temporarily (as I gather Nige Edwards did, and I did for 3½ years) or permanently -- those 'forgotten people' Harry McAvinchey wondered about a couple of issues ago. */(The absence of "old names" is deliberate policy, but it's their policy, not ours; presumably many of them are too busy with their own projects. We print whatever worthwhile letters we get, regardless of who writ them.)/*

I wonder how Kenny Penman decided that mid-60s DCs were 'lousy' if he didn't read them? Needless to say I disagree, but what's the point of arguing about ancient history; it's basically personal taste, anyway. I would admit that Marvel are currently producing more 'good' titles than DC, mainly because of some interesting art (which does not necessarily mean better, but I won't bore you with explaining what I mean), and the presence of writers like Claremont the Erratic, Moench and Michelinie. Mind you, the latter hasn't been as impressive as I thought he might be; IRON MAN particularly, though usually well-plotted, has featured some appalling dialogue of late. */(The point of arguing is the exchange of opinions it involves, and history is no less a valid subject than any other. I've found Michelinie's work enjoyable, but have been disappointed by the lack of impact of the other DC import, Michael Fleisher, who seems to have done nowt worth mentioning.)/*

I've found the art controversy raging over the past couple of issues quite entertaining; not surprising since it's one of my own pet subjects. This time I won't get involved (much), since my views have been fairly thoroughly expressed elsewhere and elsewhen, and besides I've never seen "Thrillkill" so don't know what Mike and Chris are on about anyway. However, to return to Mike's original suggestions for examples of 'serious art' in comics, I was a little surprised both choices were pieces by Adams.

Ignoring his early work at DC, which was relatively crude (surprising, since his 'Ben Casey' strip was very polished), I've always tended to regard Adams' work as 'straight' comic art at its near-best; somewhat more inventive and better-drawn than most perhaps, but still firmly rooted in the American comic-book tradition. Now, assuming we don't apply this vague term 'serious art' to the above tradition, Adams can't be considered as a contender. */(That was coincidence. The aspect of those examples which qualified them as serious art was their stories, the purpose of which was more than "mere" entertainment. Basically, they had a message. I applied the term "serious art" to the whole package, not just the artwork. Why shouldn't "serious art" be applied to traditional comicbook art. In itself, comic book illustrations are an artform, in that it involves a skilled artistic ability, complete with its own demands and crafts, and, as a vehicle for expression, as valid as prose, pictures, or film.)/*

More logical choices, following this line of reasoning, would be those artists who have deliberately and blatantly transformed these traditional frames of reference to suit their own creative ends. People like Alex Nino, George Herriman and Enrico Sio -- genuine individualists. The other side of this coin is that such esoteric approaches can make the actual **reading** difficult, and may thus be considered 'bad comics', or simply prententious. Druillet, for instance, who might fit into this category has been so dismissed by some people -- with some justification, I think. Herriman of course is an exception to every generalisation about comics.

I would imagine the vast majority of comic artists take their work seriously, whether they regard themselves as 'craftsmen' (as I do; I lack the ability to be anything more) or 'artists'. It's basically a problem of semantics. */(No, it's more than that. Everybody takes their job seriously, or at least they should do, since it's a means to a livelihood, and it represents about half of your waking life. But I think most artists know whether they are merely entertaining or earning some money, or whether they are collaborating in imparting a message, or whether they are furthering or refining comic book art.)/*

This cents/pence controversy seems merely another example of the growing commercialisation that's crept into fandom. I can't say I approve of it, but if people are daft enough to pay outrageous sums just to have the cover price in cents that's their problem. Now that dealer copies of recent imports have that diamond-shaped price tag, I wonder if a **three**-tier system will develop?

I have in fact been selling off a bundle of my old comics recently, and was a little saddened by a couple of customers who admitted quite candidly that they were buying purely from a speculative standpoint. Still, you can't really argue with their motives -- comics, or rather Marvels, seeming a good investment these days -- and if you think about it, it's us old-fashioned collectors ('hoarders' might be a better description) who ought to question what we're doing amassing these huge piles of yellowing magazines. Maybe we **ought** to, but I don't think I will.

Bob Watkins Come on Michael, if you're going to have running battles with Chris Ash and others, please do it verbally. The distinct advantage lies with the one with the instant reply -- what begins as intelligent and considerate versing dissolves into dogmatic bluster. An ego is an ego, it needs no promotion. */(If all the arguments were verbal, Reaction would be a far duller place. The only alternative to my not having an instant reply, and I know you'd all be heart-broken if I adopted that policy.)/*

A fiver goes to anyone who convinces me that the word 'reduce' as part of Adam's letter just happened to coincide with the printing crashing out of sight.

Hey, you can't fool me; that strip was really drawn by

Dave Gibbons, wasn't it? Lovely work by both Martin Lock and Dave Harwood. Having read quite a few letters by Dave, it's nice to see opinions are based on a solid artistic foundation.

I have my doubts that Mal's column will last, because mainly the material will be hard to come by. I'm all for this type of reviewing, though; stripper-zines are in my opinion the most creative thing a comic fan can ever do. */(A sweeping statement, perhaps. A well-written, well researched article is surely as creative as a story, considering that most fan-strips are amalgams rather than creations.)/*

Michael Goldstein When I saw that beautiful cover on Bem-25, I thought "Wonderful -- a Luthor Arkwright feature -- or a Bryan Talbot interview -- brill!" Well it was a good issue, but where was the twenty-page in-depth feature on Talbot? I mean, not even a few lines? Boy, you certainly win my "Raising False Hopes" award for this month. Hey, it's not too late though, you could still run the twenty page Talbot feature next issue. Seriously, I've just read the latest episode in NEAR MYTHS 4 -- isn't he worth a lead feature? */(He certainly is. When do you plan to start it?)/*

Phil Greenaway Mike, that wasn't very 'nice' of you ... inferring that I'm naive! If you re-read my last letter, you'll see that it wasn't high quality comics that I wanted to read **all** the time (though I wouldn't object!); I'd just like to read comics of at least **passable** quality -- the type of product you'd expect to read from an industry which is supposedly full of **professionals.** The trouble these days is that some people involved in comics are just trying to make a living, and are wasting their talents on comic strips which they have probably long since become bored with. I sympathize with people like this; although they should seek alternative employment, rather than foist their rushed stories on improverished comics fans such as myself. And, anticipating your reply, I get my comics through the post, and generally don't have any idea of what I'm buying; unless, of course, I know the writers and artists involved -- getting some approximation of the quality of the product.

The strips in Bem-25 were okay I suppose, though nothing spectacular. Dave Harwood has got a competent art style; and it was interesting to note the Bolton and Eisner influences in the Moon Man strip.

I'm afraid I haven't the time to write a lengthy epistle this time, but I must mention a sadly neglected facet of comics collecting -- comics sniffing. For too long now, unscrupulous dealers have ripped off unsuspecting comics buyers by selling supposedly 'mint' vintage comics, when in actuality their smell has diminished by exposure to polythene bags. Nothing can beat the smell of **old** comics, and I'm afraid that the printing methods used at Sparta these days are unable to induce my full appreciation of a comic with regards to its smell value in me. A sad, but true, indictment of the times in which we live.

Well, I'm going to get a cerebral high sniffing some old copies of the Fantastic Four now; and I can only hope that I, along with a few dedicated others, can one day get comics sniffing initiated as the art-form it truly is. We hope to draw attention to our aims by carefully smelling the stock on dealers' tables at marts and conventions, etc ... I'll keep you informed of any further progress. */(Phil, can I interest you in a couple of zillion old Charlton comics I have. The art is boring, the stories are trivial, but the aroma ... It would take you a week to come down from a sniffing session with these babies.)/*

Robert C. Hanning I found Bem-25 a bit disappointing. The strips were nice and all, but they do not justify the omission of Sigh, Made in America, the other short strips, and the review section, and the shortening of Fan-Things and Reaction (to a mere three pages!!!). Perhaps I wouldn't feel quite as cheated if it were seven (or the whole eleven) pages of "Planet Tale", but I found nothing special about "The Big Hairspray Rumpus", neither story nor art. Please, if you're going to devote that much space to a strip, make sure it's a work of art and genius (as Chris Ash's Captain Frog most certainly was).

Everything else is quite good, though. But are you **really** serious about SHE-HULK 1? Come off it, Stan! I suppose the first issue will contain an editorial denying crass commercialism and saying they're only doing it because some other nasty company was going to make a cartoon show cashing in on the Hulk's popularity. And of course we can expect a TV series, starring Lindsay Wagner; I imagine it'll get quite good ratings if they have her busting out of her shirt every week.

Katholicity was as usual quite good, and while a shortened Fan-Things is better than none at all, I'm getting a little bored with the title, which pales in comparison to OGRE's "Behind the Zines". If not for the obvious tie-in with Mr. Sallis's name, I say change it -- how about "The Zine-ic Route"?

On the whole, the art in Bem-25 was substandard, except for the "Planet Tale" strip and Colin Wilson's fine illo -- more from him, please. Perhaps you should be a bit stricter about what you accept for printing.

Which bring us to the short but ever-controversial Reaction. I will cleverly steer clear of the whole "serious art"/Neal Adams' "Thrillkill" debate, and focus my attention on the question of pseudonyms. While I think Mr. Lamprey and Mr. Bassett both have a point, I also believe that the advantages of pen-names outweigh the bad side -- the main advantage being that it allows the material to stand on its own merit, not the reputation of the writer. I, for one, am easily fooled: to wit, in Vertigo's "Vulture Awards", I listed as "worst writer in fandom" someone who, I was shocked to find, is really just a pseudonym for the person I would probably have listed as best writer in fandom! I guess I was judging by the subject matter instead of the actual writing quality involved. The fact is, pen names have always been abundantly present in writing (and drawing), and probably always will be. In fact, I believe that a big name in prodom is currently working for Marvel under an assumed name -- I'm talking about Steven Grant, who is in reality (at least, it's a theory a friend and I are working on) Steve Gerber. Just take the following facts: both spell their first names with a "v", instead of the more popular "ph"; in some of his last work for Marvel, on Captain America, Gerber revealed Cap's full name as being "Steven Grant Rogers"; Grant's first work for Marvel, the script of MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE 52, co-starred none other than Moon Knight, whose real name is, of course, Steven Grant; the two issues of DEFENDERS which are tying up all the loose plot threads left from Steve Gerber's OMEGA are scripted by none other than Steven Grant. Add to all this that Grant's work has a sort of Gerber-ish feeling to it, and all you need is a reason why. I suggest that after firing Gerber, Marvel didn't want to look bad and rehire him, so they agreed to publish his work, but under another name. I'm sure there are lots of other small clues that he planted that we've missed -- anyone want to add anything to this?

Mike Cruden a pen-name of Kathleen Glancy? I find it hard to swallow, Graeme. No, I think it's more likely that Mike Cruden is really who else but Nigel P. Edwards himself, and it's just Nige's way of publicly expressing an inferiority complex! */(Just think yourself lucky I don't understand what you mean by that!)/*

Maureen James I see a new hobby is coming along in Reaction -- it's called "Let's all disagree with Les Chester". Dear me, some of the remarks made about him, and what he said in Bem-22, have been terribly unfair I think. First a note to Mat Coward; have you exchanged letters with Les Chester? I have been for some time now, and if you had discussed as many subjects with him as I have over the last year or so you would find he is most certainly **not** a 'narrow-minded bigot'. Obviously he has opinions, the same as you and I and everyone else has -- but unlike some people, not the writers in Reaction I hasten to add, he does take the time to give them, and will discuss things in a serious way. */(I don't think it's unfair that people judge, or at least reply to, Les on the basis of his locs.)/* Oh yes, I have an idea that there are so few women in fandom because female fans know they will stand out with their contributions */(That's certainly very true)/* because they **are** female -- well, if fandom was populated with female fans instead of male I bet a lot of male fans would hesitate from contributing: */(I bet you a thousand million pounds (Theo Clarke will hold the stakes) they wouldn't; you'd have to charge an entry fee.)/* It's human nature to want to blend with the crowd, so to speak. On the other hand I think that the female fans who do contribute, like Kathleen and I, have an advantage; if a zine-ed wants a contribution from a special point of view which a woman could handle best, he's going to send for Kathleen or myself! But as I've said before, whether a person is male or female makes no difference to their work.

I think Roger Lyon is a very brave man to imply I'm a bit more feminine than Kathleen; I take it as a compliment, but I hate to think what Kathleen will be saying to him. One thing has occured to me though, if Kathleen or I wrote an article under a male alias, would anyone be able to tell it was us (not taking style into consideration)? */(Try it and see.)/*

Is Reaction getting too heavy? No, certainly not; for one thing, Reaction makes a good contrast to the rest of Bem, and for another thing I really enjoy reading various discussions -- and I'm sure that goes for the majority of Bem readers too.

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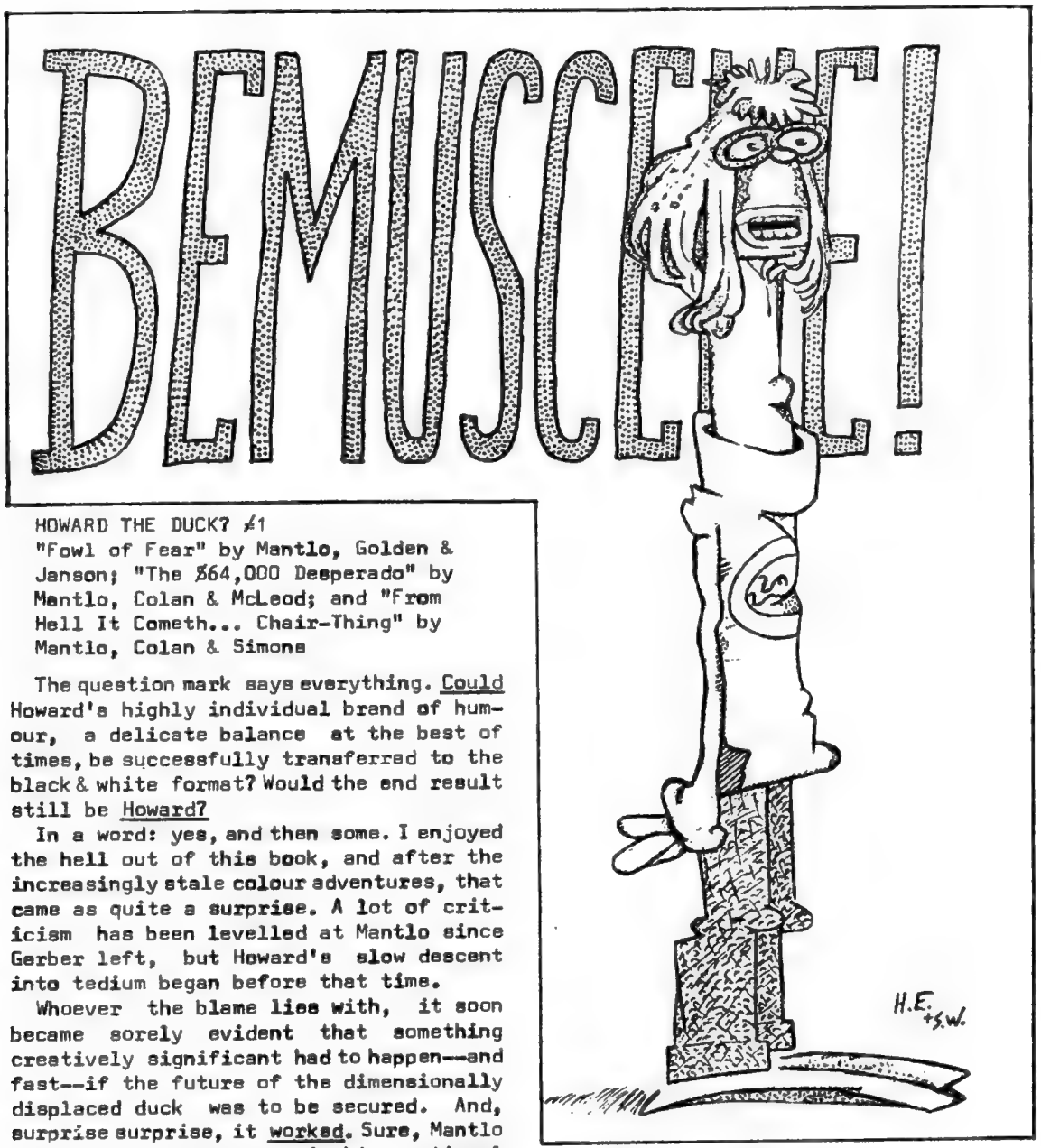
Gez Kelly



HOWARD THE DUCK? ≠1
"Fowl of Fear" by Mantlo, Golden & Janson; "The $64,000 Desperado" by Mantlo, Colan & McLeod; and "From Hell It Cometh... Chair-Thing" by Mantlo, Colan & Simons

The question mark says everything. Could Howard's highly individual brand of humour, a delicate balance at the best of times, be successfully transferred to the black & white format? Would the end result still be Howard?

In a word: yes, and then some. I enjoyed the hell out of this book, and after the increasingly stale colour adventures, that came as quite a surprise. A lot of criticism has been levelled at Mantlo since Gerber left, but Howard's slow descent into tedium began before that time.

Whoever the blame lies with, it soon became sorely evident that something creatively significant had to happen--and fast--if the future of the dimensionally displaced duck was to be secured. And, surprise surprise, it worked. Sure, Mantlo is a trifle obsessive in his continual re-introduction of past cast members (Claude Starkowitz, Arthur Winslow, etc), and sure, the bedroom scene in the final strip seems there for little more reason than to prove it wasn't passed by the C.C.A., but hell, that doesn't matter. It never did--Howard is entertainment, pure and simple. The satire, the invention, the wild plots--they're a bonus, and on this occasion there's plenty going round.

Howard the Duck? You betcha.

-Steven J. Green

CEREBUS THE AARDVARK ≠11 (August)
"The Merchant & The Cockroach"
by Dave Sim

Yes, it's me again, that "Edwards creep" and infamous "sarcastic git", as I was referred to as in last issue's lettercol. That's a comment I deeply resent--I don't deny it, I just resent it!

Strange comic this; Canada hasn't produced much of note in the comics field, with the exception of John Byrne, so this is a pleasant surprise. The story, involving schizophrenia, theft, corruption, murder, and eight feet of gold, kept me interested--but not so much amused as was intended. Apart from the fact that the hero is an aardvark, it wasn't so different from the usual sword & sorcery comic.

Perhaps I missed the point (sorry, ha ha, oh my sides); it's like when I read the Beano at a very early age, and the readers were drawn having fits when they read the comic...I could never understand why I wasn't laughing myself sick. The publisher writes that the story is "sure to keep you laughing", and I feel like a eunuch at an orgy -- completely left out. Still, nice art and a competent script; now that's not too bad a comment from a creepy, sarcastic git, is it? -N. Edwards

TIME WARP ≠2 (January)
"Return to the Stars" by Gwyon & Chaykin; "The Saviours" by De Matteis & Kane; "Metal" by Harris & Orlando; "The Last Journey" by Levitz & Ditko; "Energy Source" by Rozakis, Tanghal & Celardo; "The Truth" by De Matteis & Sutton; "Scavengers" by Kelley & Grandenetti; and "Cultural Exchange" by Kashdan, Newton & Simons

Holy Atlas! They do write stories like that any more! You mean we -- gasp -- came back from the stars the day before we left? That those beautiful humanoids were --shudder--just the pets of those creepy octopus-types in the background? That a robot could--wow--want to be a real person? That the Universe--gee--has an edge? That what our rocket landed on was really --choke--a microscope from another dimension? That the aliens wanted the glowing radioactive survivors of World War Three as -- golly -- a power source?

Warren publish an SF magazine called 1984, which publishes some rather nice science fiction, along with some male chauvinist pigswill; if DC ever want to change the name of this Dollar Comic, I'd suggest -- giggle -- 1957... -C.N. Padgett

DAN DARE ANNUAL 1980 £1.50

Although this is called the Dan Dare annual, there is only one 12-page Dan Dare story in its 96 pages. The rest of it is composed of 'Future Shock' type strips, a Judge Dredd adventure, two short text SF stories, a Rick Random reprint, three 'UFO Agent' strips from EAGLE, and 17 pages of scientific filler material.

The Dan Dare adventure (drawn by Dave Harwood) is an entertaining, if unoriginal, story about space pirates. It brings back Dan's wolf-man colleague Rok, who featured in the first Mekon adventure in 2000 A.D. and is probably the most interesting new character to feature in the 2000 A.D. Dan Dare's adventures, with his enthusiasm for raw meat and eating his enemies.

The Judge Dredd strip is a jokey one, featuring a fight between the 2000 A.D. script and art robots and the 2000 A.D. characters -- Tharg, Dan Dare, Strontium Dog and his friends, Starlord, Ro-Busters, the Mekon, MACH-zero, and even Dare's old batman Digby are involved. The full-page picture on page 58 is like a Who's Who of 2000 A.D.; the art here is reminiscent of the work of Ian Gibson, but as usual in the I.P.C. annuals both the artists and the writers are uncredited.

Of the Future Shocks, 'Garbage' (again by Dave Harwood), about the problem of waste disposal in 2090, is the best, with its giant rats and garbage mountains. Another story, '3000 AD: The Traveller' (drawn by McMahon) is about the problems that a man has getting home from work in the middle of a future war. Most of the Future Shocks in the weekly have been much more imaginative than this.

The best of the reprints is Rick Random. This one is a bit more dated than those which appeared in last year's 2000 A.D. Sci-Fi Special and the last Dan Dare Annual, but it makes good reading nevertheless. Now to the UFO Agent repeats. When these strips were originally printed in Eagle, clues were given for the readers to spot, to see how UFO Agent Grant had captured the villains -- like in "Can You Catch a Crook?", which the series replaced, and "Zip Nolan" in LION. The whole development of the stories depended upon these clues, but now any references to clues have been edited out. Hence in one story a villain escapes from Grant by car and joins a main highway, saying to himself "I'm in the clear! I've changed number plates--and there are hundreds of cars of this make and colour." In the very next frame Grant flies in (as a UFO Agent he has powers of levitation), saying "There's my boy right below!" No explanation of how he has managed to identify him is given. And there are similar anomalies in the other two stories -- why the clue-spotting idea has been edited out is puzzling, for apart from the anomalies this creates the strips do not stand up very well without them.

So, my only major criticism of this annual is its misuse of repeated material. The weekly 2000 A.D. has shown that I.P.C. have plenty of talented artists & writers available. Why don't they utilise some of this talent in producing more new material for the annuals? The addition to the budget this would need would be paid for many times over by increased sales.

-Steve Winders

RED DAGGER ≠2
"Tough of the Track" 25p

D.C. Thomson have come up with an interesting idea; a new series like the "picture library" books, but comic-size--which gives the added advantage that they can reprint old strips featuring their most popular characters. Red Dagger ≠1 featured the rebellious young footballer "Twisty", in a serial reprinted from 1976 --but issue 2 is rather more interesting, reprinting as it does a 20-part story featuring athlete Alf Tupper, "The Tough of the Track", from 1971.

I'm sure most of you have encountered this character before; he's one of the classic British comics characters. He brings energy and enthusiasm to whatever he tackles, be it a 5000 metres race, a complicated welding job (he's a welder & engineer by profession), or a big plate

GOSH ZAP POW !!

TIMES

GREETINGS MORTALS!
WE ARE BEINGS OF INFINITE POWER BY THE MEREST THOUGHT WE BROUGHT YOU HERE TO THIS A PLACE, THAT IS NOT. HIDDEN IN THE MYRAID FOLDS OF REALITY, WHERE OUR WILL IS **ALL!**

I'M YET TO BE

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T.T.F.N.

of fish and chips--it's difficult not to like him. In this story, he's recovering from a broken leg, trying to build up the wasted muscles so that he can run at his best once more--and he's soon heading for a job as General Engineer for the Kilimanjaro Railway Company in Tanzania, and searching for a witch-doctor who can make his leg well. There are crises in his work, and challenges, and races, and the strange magic of the witch-doctor -- Alf copes with it all cheerfully, and is soon popular with all the local workers.

The art is no-nonsense, which is appropriate; the old railway locomotives are excellent. The Tanzanians themselves come across well, too, if a little bit overcheerful and straightforward (like Alf!) --and the two most intelligent, kindly and thoughtful people, who are behind the whole scheme to help Tupper regain his form, are Tanzanian too. I found myself swept along by the exhilarating pace of these 64 pages, as indeed I suspect most people will be. -Ruan Lanihorne

WARRIORS OF THE SHADOW REALM
Marvel Super Special 11-13; a Weirdworld story, written by Doug Moench, pencilled by John Buscema, inked by Rudy Nebres, and painted by Peter Ledger

Now, this 3-part story has received a lot of build-up, and a lot of praise, most of it from Marvel in general and Richard Marschall, who edited it, in particular--after all that hype, one feels it's going to have to be awfully good to avoid being a complete let-down! It seemed to be the major Marvel news item for months, from initial idea, to Mike Ploog withdrawing his work, to its expansion to three books and its extension to a bi-monthly status over the summer...but here it is.

First, the criticisms: expanding the story to three books was a mistake. Not too bad a mistake when the books were scheduled to appear monthly, but when they got put back to bi-monthly it didn't do much for a story that hadn't been planned to fall into 3 neat parts. It was part 2 that suffered most; it doesn't have as much of importance going on as the others and, with only 29 pages of story, compared with 32 in part 1 and a satisfying 35 in part 3, it is decidedly lightweight. Being in the middle of that 4-month gap between the start and the finish hardly showed it off to best advantage, either...

Next, the praise: a 96-page, painted full-colour epic fantasy adventure would have to get some award for nerve, and it is to Marvel's credit that they committed themselves to such an undertaking, and, generally, gave it the resources that it needed. Tyndall's Quest is a marvellous story, with the strong, memorable figures these things need, from the Aslan-like white wolf to the well-meaning wizard who, in the end, does not have the strength to resist the corrupting call of absolute power; from the innocent Tyndall and Velanna and their elven kin who guard the tomb of evil, to the five ruthless, inhuman followers of the dead, dread Darklens, who in the end do not recognise their master and are destroyed. The world is in peril --but the world is saved. Doug Moench has created more than a comic book here, and John Buscema, in some of the finest, most imaginative work of his career, has done it full justice. The colours, added by Peter Ledger, are rich, beautiful, and glowing, and Rudy Nebres does a wonderful job of inking, adding his own magic to a magical series.

All told, this is an important trio of books, an affirmation that full-colour magazines can be used for more than adaptations of weak movies and weak adaptations of assorted rock groups. They <u>can</u> be a new kind of comic magazine, and if comics are to have a secure future this is the sort of comic that we need. -ML

GREEN LANTERN #123 (December)
"Mission of No Return" by Denny O'Neil, Joe Staton & Dick Giordano

So, the parting of the ways; Green Arrow is disposed of in 4 panels, and GL, after trying unsuccessfully to rescue Guy Gardner from the Phantom Zone (with a cameo appearance by Superman, to operate the projector's controls), flies off to Qward, whence a yellow beam has taken the erstwhile substitute Green Lantern!

The art's fine, as one would expect from Staton & Giordano, while it's good to see a sense of direction for GL again in the plot. And the Gil Kane cover, of course, is really striking. -Jonn Hay

ELFQUEST #5
"Voice of the Sun"
by Wendy and Richard Pini

So how does one categorize this tender, joyful series, one of the most interesting comics being published? This is a lighter issue than some of the previous issues, which have dealt at times with sombre things; though here too is peril, drama, as well as gentle companionship and love.

If I say that this book could only have been drawn, and co-written, by a woman, any criticism you infer should be directed at the male sex. Here we watch the hunter-gatherer wolfriders and more contented, agricultural sun-folk grow closer, as the first stage of the saga of Cutter and his friends comes to its conclusion. In these 32 pages you'll find no obligatory fight scenes, no black-hearted villains. Instead <u>life</u> is celebrated, and the lives of these remarkable elf folk become <u>real</u>. If you haven't encountered this series before, I do suggest you investigate--you will be pleasantly surprised. -C.N. Padgett

WHAT IF #18 (December)
"What If Dr Strange Had Been a Disciple of Dormammu?" by Peter Gillis, Tom Sutton & Bruce Patterson

These reworked origins can be fascinating. If Dormammu is so clever, why did he not advise Mordo to befriend Strange, and heal his nerves so that he could once more become a gifted, but arrogant, surgeon? And after his callous unconcern for his patients, nudged along by that old black magic, gets Stephen Strange struck off for malpractise, how easy it would be for Mordo to instruct him in the mystic arts, and enlist him as a disciple of Dormammu...

But that only gets us to page 8. Within these pages lurk Umar the Unspeakable, Eternity, and a valiant alliance of the last remaining white magicians, including Agatha Harkness and Dr Druid. It looks as if Strange is set to conquer all--and then the Ancient One delivers his most potent weapon, the Eye of Agamotto, into his enemy's hands. In this book there's no guarantee of a happy ending, either...but more I won't say, except that this is one of What If's better issues. -R. Lanihorne

SAPPHIRE AND STEEL
reviewed by Steve Grimshaw

Fantasy, science fiction and associated genres have been making a come-back on British television lately, with the re-showing of Star Trek, the horror films on BBC-2, Omega Factor, Blake's 7, Project UFO -- and, most recently, Sapphire and Steel. Now, when I heard David McCallum and Joanna Lumley were to co-star in a new time/fantasy/SF series called "Sapphire and Steel" I must confess to being totally underwhelmed. It did not appear, to me at least, to be a good match; still, I sat down to watch the first instalment, expecting the worst.

Briefly, the series is about <u>time</u>. Time is trying to take control of our dimension, why is never explained but it wants to, by controlling people & their actions through emotions, usually hate, fear, or resentment, and antiquities, specifically nursery rhymes in the first six episodes. This control can vary; the victims can be shrunk to infinitesimal smallness, become part of a picture on a wall, become part of someone's nightmare, or be transported to a different plane of existence for all eternity, or until the victim meets a sticky end.

Sapphire (Joanna Lumley) and Steel (David McCallum) have been assigned to stop this. From whence they came is a mystery never explained, but it appears they are two from a team of 137. Sapphire is extremely beautiful, with perfect teeth--heroines must have brilliant dentists--and radiates blue, with blue clothes, blue eyes, and as a none too surprising con-

trast long, blonde hair. Does my memory fail me? But before Purdey wasn't Joanna Lumley's hair orange/brown? Anyway, Steel radiates and wears grey. Sapphire has the power to sense age and danger, and she can take time backwards for everyone else but leave time unaffected for herself & Steel, while Steel has the ability to bring himself down to absolute zero temperature, and whilst there wipe out time's existence when it manifests itself as an image. He also has resiliance and, it appears, the brains. That may be an erroneous statement, but Sapphire never challenges his decisions.

The actual production of the series, by Shaun O'Riordan, is as a whole excellent. The mood-setting is very well done; it would do nobody any harm if the Marvel black & white magazine and Dr Strange-type artists took note of some of the lighting techniques. The special effects are well done, and don't obscure the storyline. David McCallum acts the part of Steel with depth and personality, but the "acting" of Miss Lumley really lets the show down. She may look good, but she plays the part of Sapphire like a soggy chip bag. The basic problem appears to be lack of personality on her part. Sapphire may just as well be Purdey or Jessica Van Helsing for all the difference in her portrayal of what should be three very different ladies. I could be wrong, but I doubt it, as I've never seen a script saying "Speak normally while calling for help with an axe above your neck." She may find this difficult to believe, but the voice and expression may change when you're about to lose your head!

The stories themselves, written by P.J. Hammond, are well-written and intriguing, and certainly keep you watching, waiting anxiously for the next show. I won't go into the various discrepancies over elements, alloys and atomic numbers here as it would undercut the overall excellence and accuracy of the stories, even though the only way to a full understanding of what's happening is to watch the episodes intently, without missing one moment.

About ten episodes were shown before the ITV dispute blanked out the screens, depending on the region, at 7 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The first six, which concerned nursery rhymes and time-kidnapped parents, have been published by Star Books as a novel by P.J. Hammond at 75p; the second story, still incomplete at the time of writing, concerns the spirits of soldiers killed at war. However, when the present run ends, it is unlikely to be the end for this series, as owing to high ratings--a surprise to everyone concerned and to me, expecting it to have a cult audience akin in comic terms to Killraven but not a large enough following for another lot of shows to be made -- it is likely to be brought back next year.

Reading back, I seem to have emphasized the bad points and obscured the good in places but I personally enjoy the series immensely, and the suspense between each episode is unbearable. I'll even go so far as to say that I don't really object to Joanna Lumley playing the part of Sapphire --and that, to go back to my opening paragraph, I consider Sapphire and Steel the only one of the new series (Blake's 7, Omega Factor and Project UFO being the others) worth watching, the other three being equivalent to 41 issues of Frank Robbins Invaders artwork. -Steve Grimshaw

ROM #1 (December)
"Arrival" by Bill Mantlo & Sal Buscema

Rom: Spaceknight does not hold the same appeal as The Micronauts--which was as to be expected. The Micronauts were a freak of nature, and freaks of nature are few and far between. Which is not to say that Rom is bad, it's just that it is your average fare, and as such one has to ask, why bother? And all the time we know that money is the answer.

Bill Mantlo tries hard, with this tale of aliens in our midst. Rom is a sort of cosmic Charles Bronson, trying to fulfil his own death wish; the aliens he seeks out have the ability, unfortunately, to take on human form, and when Rom blasts them to bits us real type human forms aren't too pleased. Hands are flung into the air, and we run screaming for the military -- all except one little woman, Brandy Clark (apparently her parents were alcoholics, or so the village gossip tells me), who spends most of the issue with a vacant look on her face, supplemented by the sight of her tonsils as she screams blue murder.

The art is quite good, and really is above hack standards; it shows Sal Buscema to be a good inker, and infinitely more suited to inking his own pencils than, say, Jack Abel or Mike Esposito.

As first issues go, it isn't too bad.

-Stephen McGonagle

WORLD'S FINEST COMICS #260 (january)
"The Four Billion Supermen of Earth" by O'Neil, Buckler & Giordano; the Atom in "A Tight Squeeze for the Tiny Titan" by Rozakis, Ortiz & Colletta; Black Lightning in "Lure of the Magnetic Menace" by O'Neil, Nasser & Colletta; & Captain Marvel in "There Goes the Neighbourhood" by Bridwell, Newton & Hunt

Dear Sol Harrison,

As General Secretary of the Neal Adams Copyists Branch of the Superhero Writers, Inkers and Pencillers Executive, I wish to inform you of a breach of our closed shop agreement relating to the above comic. While the lead story (a nice little bittersweet tale, I might add) and the Black Lightning piece conformed to our solemn and binding undertaking, fully 50% of the book contained material which blatantly ignored our guide-lines. Our Executive will overlook the breach as regards the Atom, as it is of such banality that we have been legally advised it is outside the term "superhero story" as defined. However, we hereby give final warning regarding the Shazam piece, featuring the original Captain Marvel, as we will not tolerate the development of a unique non-Adams style such as Brother Newton displays. One more breach of our agreement, and we shall insist on the replacement of Newton by a more comradely operative. May we suggest Don Heck?

Yours Fraternally,
Nat Soper -Barry K. Winetrobe

SILVER SUPERSWIPE --- 25 ISSUES OF SWIPES revealed by Nige Edwards

Yes, this is the 25th issue of Bem that has featured the artwork of fandom's own living enigma, Superswipe! Long-time fans may remember that I wrote about his early life and times in Alan Austin's COMICS UNLIMITED #47 (September '77), so, who better to celebrate this momentous occasion of Superswipe's small claim to fame?

Many critics, and even mere mortals such as comic fans, have dismissed Superswipe's work as just copies of original artwork; this may be true (come to think of it, it is true!), and much criticism has been written about Superswipe in various fanzines, but Superswipe has never taken any notice of this, due mainly to the fact that he can't read. He was once heard to say, and here I quote: "My critics know absolutely nothing -- but I know twice as much as what they do!"

The first of Superswipe's art for Bem, or "Bemusing Magazine" as it was then, appeared on the front cover of issue 2 (May '74), although his first work had already appeared in FANTASY UNLIMITED; it was a drawing of the Black Knight, based on a George Tuska original. Inside were swipes of Neal Adams, Marie Severin, and Pablo Marcos -- Superswipe has never been known for his good taste!

Superswipe, or Supes as he is known to his (very) few friends, had begun his long collaboration with Bem and its erstwhile editor; now, some have queried the hold that Supes has over Martin, to make him print so much of his artwork. Many have heard it rumoured that Supes knows the full, unvarnished truth about a then-prominent member of Bem's staff, 4 girls & a sheep (or was it 4 sheep & a girl?), first mentioned by this reporter in Bem-9 (May '76), and often linked with my mysterious disappearance from fandom a few issues later in Bem-15 (September '77), and ultimately my tragic death soon after. Others have said that it is in fact Lock who has the hold over Supes, forcing him to draw swipes while, it is whispered, his own original style is not unlike Barry Windsor-Smith's, and that if Supes was allowed to draw in this way he would soon be snapped up by British Marvel. If this is so, maybe Lock is acting in his best interests. Probably the most feasible explanation is that Supes is invaluable to Martin for his ability to keep to a deadline and supply artwork on a specific subject, as in the drawing of Moon Knight for an article on the character in Bem-21.

Supes has quite possibly drawn a greater collection of superheroes than most other fan artists put together; a list for Bem alone would include such as Warlock, Adam Strange, Superman, Black Canary, Deadman, Green Arrow, Dr Strange, E-Man, Manhunter, Conan, Batman, the Vision, Joker, me, Nova Kane... And that's only up to Bem-8!

Superswipe's association with Bem seems here to stay; Supes has been with Martin nearly from the start, and one could say that after such a long time, Supes is almost a part of Martin as much as he is a part of Bem. ((Aside from NPE to ML--like the clever play on words there, chief?))

The last word on Supes and his artwork should only come fittingly from our elegant editor himself, who summed up the thought that epitomizes the artist (for want of a better word) and his work when he wrote in Bem-2, before of course he'd attracted Bem's current range of artists, "--his drawings may not be completely original, but they brighten up a page rather nicely, I think."

What more can be said?

-Nige Edwards (deceased)

GHOST RIDER #39 (December)
"Into the Abyss" by Fleisher & Perlin

The man responsible for abominations like "The Last Bounty Hunter" strikes again. The Ghost Rider is becoming like one of those American TV shows where the central character pops up in new locations every week, meets new characters, turns green, then walks into the sunset...

This issue has the Ghost Rider facing up to a group of Death Cultists, whom he is more than willing to oblige -- turning most of them into human chips. One scene has the cultists cornered on a bridge (if such a thing is possible), and one of their group, smarter than the rest, says "Wait, sure, that's our escape! Death! We worship death! Death... Death... DEATH!" --and with that they throw themselves off the bridge and into the gorge. GR watches them, clenches his fists, and snarls "Murdering scum! They have cheated me of my vengeance!" Very realistic, Mike. What do you do for an encore, write Crossroads?

-Stephen McGonagle

CHAPTER TWO:

INSIDE STORY

I MUST ADMIT, WHEN THE SOLID ROCK OF THE TUNNEL'S ENTRANCE HAD CLOSED BEHIND US, I HAD THOUGHT FOR AN INSTANT WE'D BEEN SWALLOWED, AND WERE DRIVING ALONG SOME VAST ALIEN NASTY'S TONGUE

BY THE FAITH....

BUT HERE WAS THE CIVILISATION WE'D BEEN LOOKING FOR--UNDERGROUND!

WELL, FRANK, HAVE YOU READ ANY STORIES THAT PREPARED YOU FOR THIS?

NOT A ONE, LIEUTENANT... BUT ONCE WE'RE BACK ON THE CONQUEROR, I'LL WRITE YOU ONE MYSELF!

A PROMISE, YOU'LL NOTE, THAT FLUFFY KEPT ME TO

PULL UP, CORPORAL. THE SECURITY TEAM CAN STAY HERE, IN CASE OF TROUBLE, BUT THE REST OF US ARE GOING DOWN.

STRAIGHT DOWN, CAPTAIN RUSSELL?

YES, LIEUTENANT FL'FF--

RUSSELL

"--STRAIGHT DOWN!"

WORDS: MARTIN LOCK PICTURES: Dave Harwood 79

THAT'S OUR CAPTAIN FOR YOU--ALWAYS LIKES TO MAKE A SHOWY ENTRANCE. BUT BACK AT THE LANDING SITE, COMMODORE JENKINS, OUR CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR AND GOVERNMENT LIAISON OFFICER, WAS STARTING TO TAKE A HAND IN THINGS---

ANY WORD FROM CAPTAIN RUSSELL YET, LIEUTENANT?

NO, SIR--THEY'VE BEEN GONE AN HOUR NOW SO A REPORT'S OVERDUE.

HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE GONE OFF WITH THE EXPLORATION PARTY! GIVE HIM TEN MORE MINUTES, AND IF HE DOESN'T REPORT IN, SEND A TROOP CARRIER AFTER HIM.

SIR, I---

ON *MY* AUTHORITY, LIEUTENANT!

LUKE

AS YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED, JENKINS CAN BE QUITE A PAIN IN THE POSTERIOR...

I'M AFRAID THE SOLID ROCK ABOVE US IS BLOCKING THE RADIO ENTIRELY, CAPTAIN.

DON'T WORRY, FL'FF. YOU'D BETTER GET THIS BUGGY'S COMPUTER READY FOR SOME LANGUAGE WORK. AND, FRANK---

YES, CAPTAIN?

TRY AND LAND THIS THING...

GENTLY....

WAUMP

IT WILL TAKE A WHILE TO GET ANY SORT OF VOCABULARY INTERFACE, CAPTAIN. THE SHIP'S COMPUTER WOULD SPEED THINGS UP, BUT EVEN THEN IT WOULD STILL TAKE AT LEAST FIVE HOURS BEFORE WE COULD ATTEMPT ANY CONVERSATION.

SO THERE WE WERE, SURROUNDED BY ALIENS WHO'D PROBABLY NEVER SEEN AN OFF-WORLDER BEFORE, AND UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE. AND I COULDN'T HELP WONDERING HOW 20TH. CENTURY EARTHIES WOULD HAVE REACTED TO VISITORS LIKE US

STAY WITH THE CAR, CORPORAL. WAIT FOR US, AND LOOK HARMLESS.

I'LL SURELY GIVE IT MY BEST ATTENTION, SIR.

WHICH IS WHAT I DID, AS MY TWO PASSENGERS WANDERED OFF AS IF THIS WAS A SHOPPING TRIP TO THE OLD BULL RING CENTRE

2

MY PROBLEM IS, I WORRY. WITH THE CAPTAIN OUT OF CONTACT WITH THE CONQUEROR, WHAT WOULD COMMODORE JENKINS BE UP TO? AND WHY HAD WE LEFT SERGEANT WILLIAMS AND HIS TWO MARKSMEN UP ON THE VIADUCT? WAS THERE DANGER THERE?

FRANK

KEEP CLOSE BEHIND ME, AND STAY ALERT, BOTH OF YOU! I DON'T TRUST THIS TUNNEL--IF ONE END COULD CLOSE BEHIND US, SO COULD THE OTHER!

THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A REASON FOR THAT, CHIEF. AND IT WASN'T A DOOR CLOSING, IT WAS THE TUNNEL ITSELF CLOSING TO NOTHING!

SO STAY ALERT, AND EARN YOUR PAY, SHINER.

SARGE, DO YOU HEAR ANYTHING?

ONLY YOUR KNEES KNOCKING TOGETHER, COTTS MY FRIEND.

NO, A RUMBLING SORT OF GROWL ...IT'S COMING NEARER, I THINK...

YES, I HEAR...

RRAAARR!

HOLY...

GOT THE DEVIL!

ZZZIIITT

3

BUT WHILE ONE PROBLEM WAS BEING OVERCOME, THAT OF GETTING SERGEANT WILLIAMS OUT FROM UNDER A VERY LARGE, VERY DEAD TIGER TYPE, ANOTHER WAS BREWING BACK AT THE CONQUEROR

I'M TAKING FULL COMMAND, LUKE. YOU'RE TO FOLLOW THE ROUTE THE CAPTAIN TOOK, AND TAKE NO CHANCES. IF IN DOUBT ... SHOOT FIRST!

BUT, COMMODORE, THIS IS A CONTACT MISSION...

ENSIGN KATHLAR, THE SAFETY OF THE SHIP COMES FIRST--AND OUR CAPTAIN IS OUT THERE SOMEWHERE.

ALWAYS THINKING OF OTHERS, OUR COMMODORE

...NOT TO MENTION WHAT THEY CAN DO FOR HIM!

YOUR JOB IS TO FIND CAPTAIN RUSSELL AND HIS MEN--AND QUICKLY!

WE'LL DO WHAT WE CAN, COMMODORE.

AND SO THE HEAVY MOB ROLLED OFF AFTER US. HALF OUR NUMBER WERE EXPLORING A DARK AND DANGEROUS TUNNEL; THE CAPTAIN AND FL'FF WERE STROLLING THROUGH AN ALIEN CITY UNARMED AND UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE....

AND YOUR NARRATOR WAS SITTING IN OUR BUGGY, WONDERING *WHY* WE'D FOUND THE EXTERIOR OF THE PLANET DESERTED, WITH ALL THE LOCALS SAFELY TUCKED AWAY UNDERGROUND

DID THEY KNOW SOMETHING WE DIDN'T?

TO BE CONTINUED!

fan-things
BY ED SALLIS

Since it had furthest to come, let's start with TACC ≠9--The Australian Comic Collector, to be formal. It costs two (Australian) dollars, plus as much again in postage, from Joseph Italiano,

for 32 A4 pages, and features an X-Men cover, a report on the first Australian comics convention, held in June, an article on whether or not comics are art by the local versions of Chris Ash and Mike Cruden, an index of Steranko's comics work, a 3-page strip made a little hard to follow by the use of a local word, "nellas", in the punchline, news, and an interview with the artist on an Australian comic that ran for 53 issues from 1948, CAPTAIN ATOM...in fact, it's like a younger version of Bem or Comics Unlimited in many ways. And in their comics awards, announced at the Comicon, guess where the best group, best writer, best title, best penciller, and best inker awards went? Yes, Professor X's team certainly get around! The Australifans are also in agreement with us that Batman is the best comics character and Savage Sword the best magazine, while the "Taccyes" for best story, best non-mainstream and best professional went to Avengers Annual ≠7 (a winner last year in the Eagles), Star * Reach, and Jim Starlin, respectively. And Comicon '80 will be held in Melbourne from the 14th to 16th June next year, if you're planning a visit that way!

Overseas again for DOC SAVAGE FORUM ≠1, which costs 50 cents by sea or 90 cents by air (I assume that now that exchange controls have been lifted, one can go into any large bank and buy a dollar bill or two...) from Daryl S. Herrick.

In its 16 unreduced A5 pages, besides editorial and a fanzine review, is a short article on Doc's involvement in the Martian Invasion of 1938 (as documented by Orson Welles at the time), and a fascinating exchange of letters from early 1934, in which complaints of plagiarism were made against the twelfth Doc Savage novel, "The Man Who Shook the Earth" (Bantam reprint ≠43), due to similarities with "The Earth Wrecker" by Murray Leinster, published the previous year in ARGOSY. Luckily, due in no small part to the tact of Murray Leinster (or Will F. Jenkins, if you're into real names), the matter was settled amicably. If you're a fan of Doc and his crew, this is a zine you'll enjoy.

And if you're a fan of Gerry Anderson's "Century 21" projects, MAGAZINE OF TOMORROW ≠4 43p from Graham Bleathman,

for 24 A5 pages is sure to appeal. A few months ago I'd have called this expensive, and in truth a postal price almost the same as Bem for fewer pages half the size it is not the best value about, but I'm sure Graham needs every penny to keep this promising, well-produced fanzine on the scene. I don't know if we get the fanzines we deserve--but we surely get the fanzines we pay for! Besides various articles, there are numerous photographs from the various TV series, such as Captain Scarlet (my personal favourite) and Thunderbirds, and part 3 of Graham's strip, set in a futuristic parallel world's 1902, "The 2nd British Empire". Do I detect touches of the Trigan Empire, Bellamy, and Luther Arkwright?

Mention of Bem-25's cover star moves me on to a fanzine I can recommend especially to those people who, like me, regretted that there was nothing inside the last Bem about the cover's creator, Bryan Talbot. ARGENT VOID PRESS ≠3 28p for 32 A5 pages from John Foster,

features an 8-page interview, plus a self-

portrait and a plethora of illustrations from the Luther Arkwright series--and it is interesting stuff. And Bryan proof-read most of the interview, and provided a cover which brings together Ace Wimslow, Chester P. Hackenbush, Luther Arkwright, and Frank Fazakerly on the same page for the first time. Reviews, letters, a short story, another excellent personal-type column by Phil Elliott, Phil Greenaway (illustrated by Alan Hunter, the most professional fan around) on the split between comics fandom and sf fen...all are good reasons to part with your cash. I found the part of "A Much Neglected Face" by Howie J. Hampton that dealt with fanzine covers a bit of a let-down, as it only took a little over half a page, and mainly reached the conclusion that full-page drawings were a good idea...but that is only because Howie had led me to hope for more by his thoughtful work earlier.

You'll have seen on page 12 an ad for SOUNDZINE; what it is is a stereo-recorded C60 cassette, with a mixture of dj-style talk, music, discussion, and fantasy. I enjoyed it, although, as with most first issues, it isn't perfect. I don't think their recorder had the Dolby system of noise reduction--and the recording level, especially on some of the speech, was a bit low. Like any stereo recording, you can play Soundzine on mono equipment--but as sometimes one channel's being used for a nice quiet chat about the comics code, while the other's belting out the Hulk's closing music, you could be in trouble if you can't adjust the two channels separately to fade down the music. Some of the music on the tape sounds like Geoff Love rather than Original Soundtrack, but half a "Visit to Marineville", a Century 21 record featuring Troy Tempest, is nice in particular, and all in all I recommend this excellent idea. Issue 2 should be out by now, concluding that trip to Stingray's base, and featuring an interview with Len Wein; I look forward to hearing it.

THE DWELLERS ≠2 came out after the con in London, and tells a harrowing story of poor sales at the fanzine table there, and general lack of enthusiasm--though not on the part of the contributors here! 25p to Richard Ashford,

gets you 20 A4 pages, including a nifty Nick Neocleous cover, a 9-page strip written by Michael Harris and stunningly, beautifully drawn by Bob Watkins, and an 8-page story of everyday elf folk by Mike again and Colin Stanford--well worth your money, okay?

To obtain the original editorial page for the above, and its 2-page lettercol, you need a copy of SPEAKEASY ≠2, another Phoenix Publication, which Richard will gladly send you for 15p in stamps. But SPEAKEASY ≠3 (for 2 10p stamps) is now the latest issue, with a wicked spoof of a British Marvel monthly cover, and inside in 18 A4 unreduced pages are letters, some nice art, and quite a lot of editorial matter, including some comprehensive British comics news. Is this zine the next major UK newszine? Tune in, and find out!

FANDOM ≠9 24 A5 pages for an s.a.e. from Eddie Walsh, Fandom Publications,

is as usual an agreeable mixture of Eddie's sales list and a news & reviews fanzine--how can you go wrong? Lots of cover repros, free wants ads with any order, reviews of a nice selection of fanzines...

And what nicer fanzine to move on to than one of the Comics Heroines Fan Club publications that Martin Lock, my affable alter ego (it says here), is British Agent for? THE HEROINES SHOWCASE ART PORTFOLIO ≠2 has 36 6¼" x 9½" pages, including full-colour covers, and features the Fantasy Art of Lela Dowling -- if you've seen the cover of THE UK HEROINE SHOWCASE ≠2, you'll be an admirer of Lela's work already, and the news that this classy magazine has 31 of her fabulous drawings, plus some amusing strips, will get your £1 into the post to Worcester right away! Lela has a lot of talent, and has a portfolio due from Schanes & Schanes soon; it can't be as good value as this fan publication, though!

STRIPS ≠11 comes from David Morgan,

however, it too has a British Agent, no less a worthy than Keith Walker of FANZINE FANATIQUE,

so sending £2.70 (for surface mail) or £5.40 (for air mail) to Keith will enrol you for a subscription. This issue has 36 6½" by 10" pages, with (you guessed?) lots of strips by New Zealand artists. And lots of stripped-down wimmen, too...

Closer to home, Stephen Bailey's FAN-SHEET ≠8 with 8 A4 pages for 10p from Sonley,

comes complete with PURE FANTASY ≠1 (another 8 A5 pages--have I mentioned recently that A4 is Bem size, while A5 is an A4 sheet folded in half?), so is quite a bargain...and issue 9, at 12p, is due around Christmas/New Year with 16 A4 pages. F-S isn't as slick as Graphic Sense or Vertigo, but it's produced by fans for fans, and is the sort of zine that's ideal for newcomers who want to "break in" to contributing artwork or articles to fanzines.

Ah, here's a zine that somehow got here too late to review in Bem-25; STAR ZONE ≠2, at 35p for 30 A4 photostat-reproduced pages from Dave Currie.

It's a stripzine, starring a 7-page "Diamond Dogs" strip, inspired by David Bowie of course, a 5-page barbarian strip, and a space-set 4-pager, plus features and fiction. I can't say that the strip art is top-notch, though the art by Derek Simpson on the Bowie strip looks promising; however, the only way for an artist to come on is for his work to be published, and for that we need lots of healthy stripzines -- and for that, people like Dave need your 35p.

TWO-BIT TALES 55p for 20 A4 pages from Ed Lux,

is, on the other hand, pro quality; the 15-page "Asterisk Hill" story is captivating, completely compelling, and worth rather more than Ed Lux is charging!

Howard Stangroom, who edited the late, over-ambitious YANCY STREET JOURNAL, has returned; as the YSJ title wasn't his, it's COMIXINE ≠4 we welcome back, with 20 A5 pages for 33p from Howard Stangroom.

This more modest effort is, I think, a better fanzine than YSJ ever was, with such intriguing pieces as "No Sex Please, We're Super-Women" by Harwood St. Morgan (to the best of my knowledge, not a pseudonym for Martin Lock!), an "insane musical" by Kathleen Glancy, six pages of a strip called "Nimrod" by art editor Nigel Kitching, which looks quite promising, news, a sales list, two short articles by Keith Williams, and the low-down on the YSJ operation by Howard. A good zine.

One thing that does annoy me--and normally I'm so quiet you'd hardly know I existed--is when I get sent a magazine months after it came out with some airy apology for forgetting to send it earlier... And the next thing I know is that they are grumbling that I'm ignoring them. That's happened with one stripzine lately -- it's really too late to review it now, though since I did preview it, and it was reviewed in another part of Bem last time, the editors have no cause to complain. But, fan-eds, if you want a prompt review here or in Fantasy Trader, please despatch your fanzine to us promptly, okay?

DOOMZINE ≠3 came out in time for the London Comicon, which editor Jonny White was expecting to be "superior" to the "Official" Con; the general opinion I've come across after the act has been the reverse. Anyway, 25p buys you 32 A5 pages from Jonny,

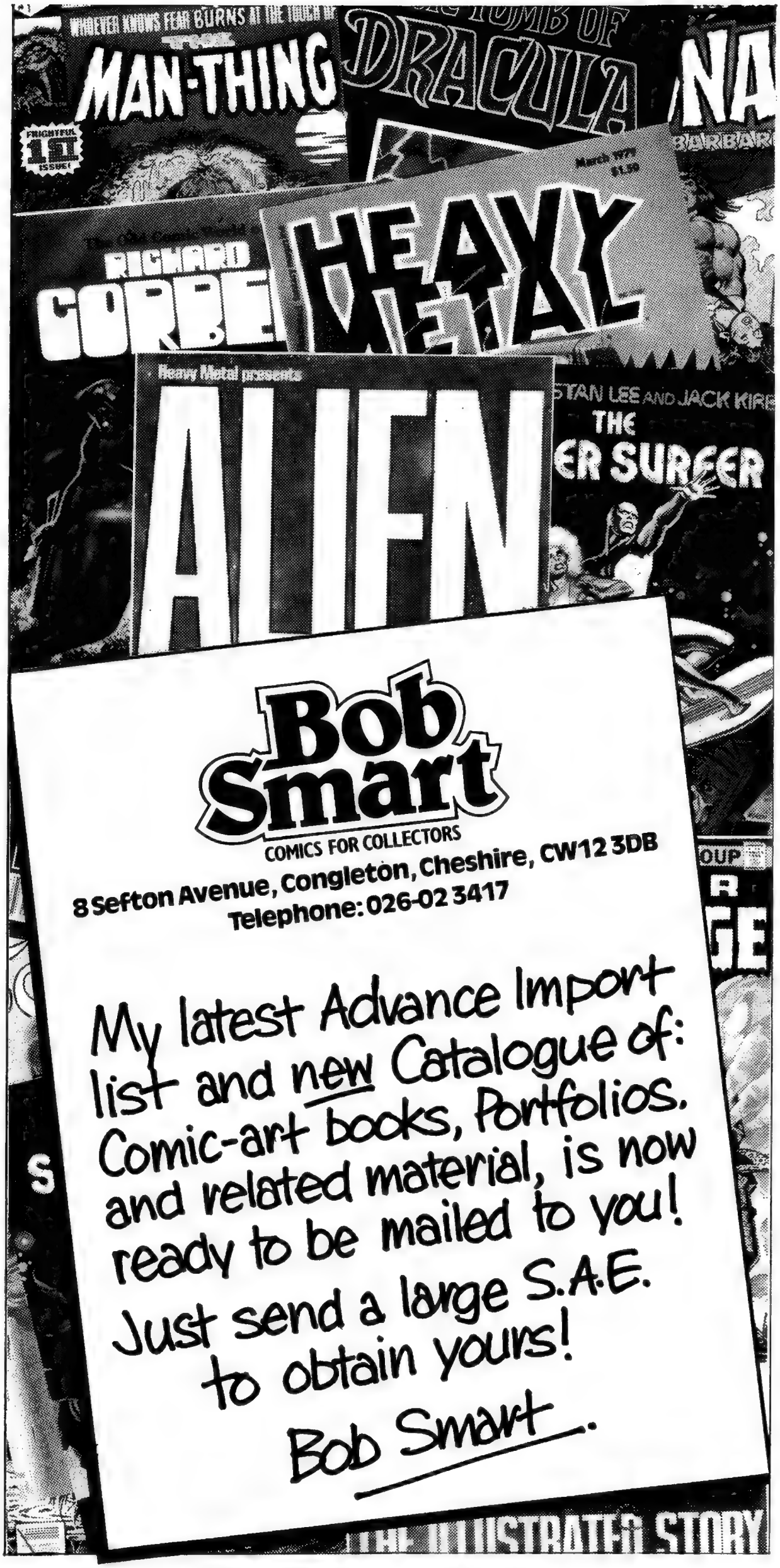
with a long lettercol, a thoughtful fanzine review column, a personal view of fandom by the zine's editor, the fun strip "Chipman", and other good stuff, including art by Pete Scott, Dave Hornsby, Martin Forrest, Billy Mulraney, and others. If there's a fanzine "top ten", Doomzine belongs in there...

DAILY STRIPS ≠3 is an excellent full-size reprint of "The Spanish Lady", a 1976 Garth adventure by Frank Bellamy, John Allard and Jim Edgar -- you get 96 strips in 24 A4 pages for £1 from John Dakin,

and the reproduction is truly *excellent*, for this 16-week story set in the time of Queen Elizabeth I, Francis Drake and the Spanish Inquisition. It's fine to see this work reprinted so well; John says he also has copies of ≠1 (Garth in "Bride of Genghis Khan") & ≠2 (Romeo Brown in "The Arabian Knight") in stock, at 75p each by post, in case you missed his ads in Bems 24 & 25. At about a penny a strip, these are remarkable value.

Maureen James informs me that Mark Finch isn't going to produce WORLDS any more--however, back issues 9 to 12 cost 25p each from him. Issue 12 for example has 12 A5 pages, from Mark

--artists involved in this special "Sci-Fi Sexploitation" ish include Bob Watkins, Mark Casto, Phil Elliott, Alan Hunter, and Dave "Naughty Bits" Byrom -- and photos of Mo James and two other female contributors are printed!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"Mr B. Presents: Pete Scott's SUB-LIMN" is a very interesting item, with 8 A5 pages for 20p in stamps from Graeme Bassett,

it's an all-new assortment of the facts and fancies of Pete Scott, no stranger to Bem, lavishly illustrated by that gentlefan. He's an interesting chap; logically, it's an excellent zine.

But I really ought to plug Gez Kelly's FANTASY TRADER 15p for around 20 A5 pages from Gez Kelly

--or £1 for 12 issues); ≠42 is the issue sent out with this Bem to Bem subscribers, boasting a fill-in fanzine review col by Ro-Jaws (yeah, well...), while ≠43 should be out very soon now, with a proper "Fanhunter" col by me, and no doubt the other regular features. Gez is working hard to build up FT--so check out what he's doing! And of course FT is the fanzine marketplace for buying comics by post, these days...

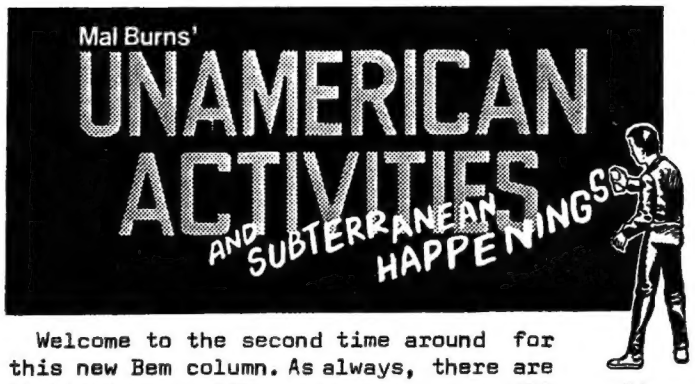
Also from Gez, as advertised on page 20, is THE SUCCESSORS ≠1, with 24 10¼" by 8" pages for 35p by post, featuring the 14-page conclusion to the superteam story previously running in GRAPHIC SENSE 4 to 6, scripted by Dave Edge & drawn by Keith Luck; the rest of the pages are features and a couple of house ads. The longer length seems to suit this strip--I found myself enjoying it much more than before. Keith's stylish, bold art, and Dave's solid scripting, give this book its own character, owing more to TV's Avengers than to Stan Lee's; it's well done.

APOCALYPSE SUMMER SPECIAL 25p from Dave Hornsby,

for 20 A4 pages) is a fill-in issue, featuring strips drawn by Dave and written by Paul Jay, Neil Peart of Rush (in that Dave has adapted the first half of "Cygnus X-1", a song by that group, with some lovely air-brushing), Dave himself, and Mike Harris. Most interesting in some ways is this last 6-pager, a Judge Dredd adventure that Mike and Dave hoped originally to sell to 2000 A.D.--it's far less "professionally" done, strangely, than a lot of Dave's work. But then, Brian Bolland is a tough act to follow!

And that's a phrase one can use for any recent issue of COMICS UNLIMITED; ≠51 is the current one now, with 24 A4 pages for 35p from Alan Austin,

and I highly recommend it--goodies include Alan's own report on his recent trip to America, a 4-page funny animal space strip by Jean-Daniel Breque, and the second half of Alan Brightmore's "Consumer's Guide to D.C. Comics". For years, CU was one of the best regular fanzines; on this showing, it is right up there once again. -ED SALLIS



Welcome to the second time around for this new Bem column. As always, there are limitations on time and space -- so I'll save the new British comix and stripzines for next time, and plunge straight into the book news.

There is a little group of publishers that one tends to bracket together -- Big O Publishing, Pierrot Books, Paper Tiger, Dragon's World, Dragon's Dream, and Phin Publishing. A certain style & distribution system has characterised these in the past and still does -- despite moves by the larger publishers to jump in on the contemporary art wagon. Anyhow, this group are surprising us all this year with countless new items -- many of which will be of interest to comicbook readers.

The most exciting and most hailed book of the season must be THE STUDIO, published by Dragon's Dream. This showcases the works of Mike Kaluta, Jeff Jones, Berni Wrightson, and some other guy whose name seems too long to remember. All these artists originate in the comicbook area, and have many followers because of this. The work in this book is quite splendid on the whole, if having little to do with comics as such. And a companion volume by Jeff Jones alone, from the same publisher, is IDYLL. This cute little comic heroine (?) has been reprinted the world over with much critical acclaim. Now, at last, an edition is unleashed upon the British buying public. One hopes it sells! If so, Dragon's Dream will be moving more and more into this area, with further illustrated novels and graphic narratives. A third book called THE ART OF JEFF JONES will be released early next year, and one calendar for each of the 4 studio artists will be seen for 1981. Mike Kaluta has now begun work on METROPOLIS--another book of his artwork, for release late next year.

Also on the comics front from Dragon's Dream are LONE SLOANE/DELIRIUS & YRAGEAL/URM--two books by French artist Philippe Druillet. These have been around for a year or so, but would still make pleasant Xmas goodies for someone. More recent, however, is THE MAN FROM NOWHERE--a "Dan Dare" classic story by Frank Hampson. All the rights to old works featuring this character have been bought from IPC, and plans are to release further volumes at the rate of two per year, with an eventual total of twelve books.

Three more art books will be issued by Dragon's Dream before Christmas. These are SENTINEL, featuring the art of Sid Mead, AN EXORCISM, featuring more photo-collage by Penny Slinger, who did a previous book called MOUNTAIN ECSTACY for the same publisher, and THE SECRET ART, featuring the drawings of Ian Miller. SENTINEL is an amazing book, containing some highly colourful technological and fantasy images. The other two are yet to be seen.

An associate company to Dragon's Dream is Dragon's World, who also publish under the imprint of Paper Tiger. This company too has many new items ready for Xmas. One of these, THE FLIGHTS OF ICARUS, has been out in America for over a year; it showcases the work of many international artists. About half the images have been duplicated in other books, but the rest remain unseen in anthology form. This book is either for completists, or for people looking for an introduction to the fantasy art book field. For the latter, it will make a very nice package indeed. Two other new books are aimed more at the children's market, but may well be of interest to adults anyhow. They are TINKER: THE HOLE-EATING DUCK, by artist Patrick Woodroffe, and MASTER SUCKUP'S CLOAK by artist Brian Froud. Both are very impressive, given their nature.

Pierrot Publishing have two new books ready. These are PLANET STORY (a novel by Harry Harrison, illustrated by Jim Burns), and ALIEN LANDSCAPES (an anthology of SF and fantasy artworks by ten of Britain's top book cover illustrators). The interesting thing with this volume is that all the content is new, rather than reprints of earlier work--with all the re-cycling going on nowadays, ALIEN LANDSCAPES makes a nice change. All the above publishers are in fact forecasting an "over-kill" situation, and are developing more original works for their series.

Big O Publishing are probably so busy distributing all of the above that they find little time left to publish books themselves -- they do however have one surprise with GIGER'S ALIEN, featuring further art from the movie Alien by H.R. Giger, the Swiss NECROMICON artist.

Talking of the Alien movie, an English edition of the Goodwin & Simonson illustrated story is available from Futura, who also do THE BOOK OF ALIEN, featuring background information on the film.

A book by artist Howie Chaykin, written by Mike Moorcock, has been completed and will be published in America for Xmas by Heavy Metal. The second volume of Howie's graphic adaptation of Alfred Bester's THE STARS MY DESTINATION is also out now.

Continuity Associates, the company run by artist Neal Adams, were at the Frankfurt Book Fair to promote a new affiliate company called Continuity International. This company has around twelve new books by well-known comicbook artists, including Howie Chaykin, Craig Russell, Neal Adams, Gray Morrow, & Mike Golden; it is unclear which book will be published first, but the new year will certainly bring some surprises. All the books are actual comic stories, and complete novels.

Hamlyn books have followed up their two sci-fi art anthologies, SPACECRAFT 2000-2100 and GREAT SPACE BATTLES, with the new SPACEWRECKS and GHOSTSHIPS; this success has obviously inspired Octopus Books, with SPACE WARS: WORLDS AND WEAPONS, and International Book Productions (IBP), with STAR QUEST, the first of a six-volume series.

If all of this is too much to take, I suggest you forget the lot and search out CAZA. Les Humanoides Associes, who publish METAL HURLANT, have recently released a book of this fine artist's work. There are no comics included, but otherwise it collects together all the paintings and illustrations Caza has done over the years. The resulting package is beautiful and deserves full attention.

The above volume is the first of a squarebound series, akin to the Dragon's World format, from Les Humanoides Associes --following in the new year will be books containing the work of Moebius, Druillet and the other top French painters.

I have devoted a lot of space to this book coverage, especially with Christmas being a mere few weeks away. There are plenty of other books around too, but I believe that the above covers all those which will be of direct interest. If any others do appear, I'll bring them to you next time. -MAL BURNS

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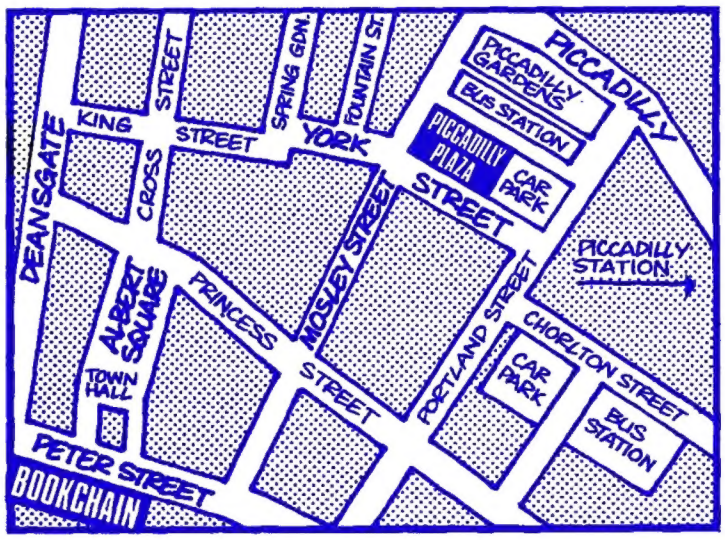

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THEY CAME IN ALL SIZES AND SHAPES
BY HOWARD P. SIEGEL

When DC published their Limited Collectors' Editions and Marvel their Treasury series, readers were somewhat startled by the almost tabloid size of these deluxe publications. To those of us who were introduced to the world of comic books some three-and-a-half decades before, such oversized publications and other out-of-the-norm formats were equally awe-inspiring. These unusual comic books will be my subject for this issue of Bem.

Fawcett Publications, the home of the original Captain Marvel, can take credit for a host of these innovations. For instance, they published the smallest, thickest (in terms of page count) and least expensive comic books of the era. They followed Fiction House will tabloid size editions, and pioneered the use of metallic inks and watercolour paintings on their covers -- quite a record, considering that their life and death was linked with a single superhero!

In 1938 the first eight issues of Fiction House's JUMBO COMICS were 10½" by 14½" in size, with most of the interior printed in black and white, with some red; Fawcett went one better. Despite the fact that Fiction House's experiment was a failure because shops could find no way of displaying the oversized book in the comics section, and young readers found it unwieldy to handle, Fawcett tried their luck: the first six issues of MASTER COMICS were equally large, but all in colour. Again the idea was a financial disaster. Not to be disheartened, they offered NICKEL COMICS, a biweekly, 32-page almost brochure-like title which gave birth to Bulletman -- but when dimes were so scarce, once could ill afford to pass up SUPERMAN or CAPTAIN MARVEL in those days for a half purchase and a nickel change that had no marketplace use. It lasted eight issues, but remains today one of the scarcest commodities on the collectors' market.

Comic books as premiums are not new. In fact, the first comic book as we know it, FAMOUS FUNNIES, was invented by Max Gaines in 1933 as a premium for breakfast cereals. Fawcett, however, found a new dimension; their 3" by 4" minlature, besides being sold as premiums, were stapled to the covers of their regular books as bonuses. Certain issues of CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES, WHIZ COMICS, MASTER COMICS and WOW COMICS had mini-editions featuring Captain Marvel, Spy Smasher, Bulletman and Minute Man in single black & white stories on the front.

For the holidays, Fawcett put out 324 page collections of whole regular comics under the titles XMAS and GIFT COMICS. For the then unheard of price of 50 cents, XMAS COMICS No. 1 gave you reprints of WHIZ 21, CAPTAIN MARVEL 3, BULLETMAN 2, WOW 3 and MASTER 18! Until then, only the 15 cents NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR COMICS, with 96 pages, had been above the normal dime price. I won't be pedestrian and make comparisons with today's page counts and prices; I leave the mental gymnastics to those who wish to sigh as they realise the results.

Special issues, such as the hundredth issue of CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES, had covers using silver metallic inks. Watercolour paintings were used for outstanding events, including the introduction of Mary Marvel in CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES No. 18; and who could forget Mac Raboy's use of the air brush when Captain Marvel Jr. appeared on the front of MASTER COMICS? Photography was used when warranted -- NYOKA, THE JUNGLE GIRL was a successful movie serial, so it was appropriate that many of the covers featured Kay Aldridge, who had the cinema role. And Captain Marvel appeared wherever possible within the Fawcett fiefdom, even on the cover of MECHANICS ILLUSTRATED, their monthly carpentry and building magazine.

Not all of Fawcett's experiments worked. They had a "pop-up" feature on the drawing boards, which would have had Captain Marvel standing tall when the reader unfolded the centre of the comic book. However, the machines were unable to crease the scores properly, and insertion plus stapling were impossible at high collating speeds. For similar reasons, Archie Publications failed to go ahead with the idea of placing a Katy Keene pin-up doll and stand made out of thin cardboard in several of her fashion specials in the mid-fifties.

In writing about the unusual, I would be remiss in not mentioning some of the non-Fawcett oddities. WHAM-O GIANT COMICS was perhaps the biggest comic book ever published in the United States. It was a one-shot experiment by a leading toy manufacturer, with a 14" by 21" page size. The only significant feature in it was Wally Wood's "Radian", with a plot which followed the Superman origin somewhat. The paper was cheap pulp grade, the colours reproduced poorly, and the asking price of 98 cents in 1967 made the idea a short-lived one.

The "premiums" common to the first issues of many British publications are not unknown to American collectors. The 3D comic books, common in the early 1950s, included special glasses with one green and one red lens so that the dimensional illusion came through as one scanned the two-colour printed pages. Most notable were the Superman and Batman 1953 specials (the latter reprinted in 1966 to take advantage of the Batman-TV craze) and Simon & Kirby's CAPTAIN 3-D for Harvey Publications. Harvey also published some of the earliest digest-size comic books: SPITFIRE, POCKET (issue one contained the oft-reprinted Black Cat origin), and three issues of SPEED COMICS were 100 pages in length, with slightly reduced panels. The concept never caught on. One of the reasons was that it was difficult to fold the pages over, a quite common way of reading, even to this day. For that reason, one of these issues without spine cracks is a rare item indeed in today's market. Again, dealers were hard put to find the proper place to display them, because of their size.

Will Eisner's Spirit started as the star of a special pull-out section in many newspapers who did not have their own colour comic section, or subscribe to the syndicated Sunday supplements of the forties. Some papers arranged the layouts so that the reader could create his own comic book by cutting and folding properly. It was easy for the master of Wildwood Cemetery to make the transition to the Quality House stable from there.

And yet, the standard format as we know it remains the norm. Considering the profusion of titles during the forties and fifties, one would think that more innovations and acceptable changes would have resulted. From 1940 to 1955, approximately 8586 different titles appeared in the United States, with a September, 1952 highpoint of 110 recorded. The highest total number of pages printed in a single month was almost 6000 in December, 1941; most books were 64 and 68 pages then. The count lessened thereafter, with the first 60-pagers appearing in 1943. The downward trend continued with some titles containing 52 pages in 1944, 36 in 1945, and downward forever after. The point of these statistics is to illustrate the permanancy of the comic book as a physical unit.

Another oddity of the 40s resulted from overproductions, and too many unsold copies. The major publishers, rather than take a loss, sold to various commercial "fast dollar" companies coverless issues. These were put together in haphazard combinations of two comics, with new generic covers: DOUBLE COMICS is an example. A BLUE BEETLE and a DETECTIVE COMICS, CAPTAIN AMERICA and PEP COMICS, JUNGLE COMICS and PLASTIC MAN might find themselves as partners in the 128 page annual. As the title and number information now put on the first story page was then very often on the inside of the discarded original front cover, panelologists became detectives and tried to identify the titles and/or issue numbers. There was no uniform sequence or limit to the different variations that appeared quarterly in various parts of the country, and in retail outlets other than the usual magazine shops. Very often the same combination of features appeared between different covers during the same year.

And how about comic books whose first feature began with the third page of the story, or stopped halfway through? This was the case with many books appearing under the IW Enterprises (1963-4) and Super Comics (1966-7) banners. One Irving Wald, through circumstances still not clear, obtained from a warehouse, so the story goes, old printing plates. With or without permission, he used them to print up 24 page comics which sold for 7 to 10 cents each in variety outlets; they had new covers, many done by the Ross Andru-Mike Esposito duo. For those of us who relished Golden Age classics, some were inexpensive bonanzas. There were stories of Plastic Man, The Spirit and Doll Man from Quality, Mr. E, Dynamic Man and The Black Dwarf from Harry "A" Chesler, and many others, including The Green Lama, Blue Beetle, and Phantom Lady. The incomplete stories resulted when some of the plates were missing, or too worn to be used again. I remember trying to interview Mr. Wald for my "Comic Collector's Comments" column. He worked in cramped quarters behind locked doors, and would communicate with outsiders through an intercom phone located on the wall of a telephone booth-size reception area. Needless to say, he would not see me and, in fact, cut my query off quite curtly.

NOTES ON DITKO'S SPIDER-MAN AND OTHER OUTCASTS OF SOCIETY
by Frank Latimer

How do I begin to discuss someone who helped to preserve my sanity?

Is that a strange thing to say about a comic book artist? Maybe it is, but I really think that there are others reading this who will understand. Steve Ditko is more than just a comic artist -- he co-created Spider-Man, and had a lot more to do with the writing than Stan Lee or Marvel will admit. If you don't believe me, then read issues of the comic by Ditko, and then read issues right after he left the book -- the two kinds of stories are really different. Under Ditko, Spider-Man was a tragic figure, and the depth the people had in those stories was like nothing anyone had ever seen. Sure, all of Marvel's other comics had tragic heroes, but none of them suffered the alienation that Spider-Man did. He was a loner. His life was a shambles. Everything he achieved was a struggle, and no one understood him, in or out of costume.

Who could identify with a person who was an outcast, who was mocked by his friends, a misfit who seemed out of touch with everything around him, and who possessed a secret which he couldn't share?

I could. When I began reading Spider-Man in the early 1960's, it was for the same reason I read other comics. For escape. I was fourteen, deeply troubled, and I needed to get outside the world for a while. Why I needed to get away from everything was because I was Gay -- and I had nowhere to turn, and no one to talk to. I'm not saying that it's easy being Gay in the 1970's, but back then it was worse. In 1963 where did a Gay kid have to turn? "Gay Pride" were two words which no one could ever imagine could go together. Who did a Gay kid have to look up to, and feel he was worth something? We weren't told about the many important and creative people throughout history who were homosexuals, because that didn't fit in with what we were taught about queers being worthless people. If even today school administrators refuse to accept the fact that they have Gay students, needing guidance and help just as much as the other kids growing up, what could I expect then? Nothing. So I suffered silently, trying to understand myself.

Then I read Ditko's Spider-Man.

It all fell together. I found a way to work it out, and understand at last. Here was a role model of the kind which society had refused to supply. This guy was an outsider; he was different from everyone else he knew. Most people looked down upon him -- remember that great splash page from AMAZING FANTASY No. 15, showing Peter Parker off by himself while the rest of the people he knows point to him and laugh? I couldn't believe it! The misfit was a good guy. The outcast was a person of infinitely more respect than all the people who put him down, even if no one else but the reader knew it.

Fate had dealt him a rotten hand, but he didn't let it get him down. He suffered anguish and soul-searching, but came through it in one piece. He had a secret, what many would consider a terrible secret (Spider-Man was wanted by the police. What he did was looked upon by some as *criminal*), another identity which had to be carefully guarded. Even to the fourteen-year-old kid I was then, the parallels were striking. I hadn't yet learned much about symbolism or allegory at that time, but I was getting a good lesson in it.

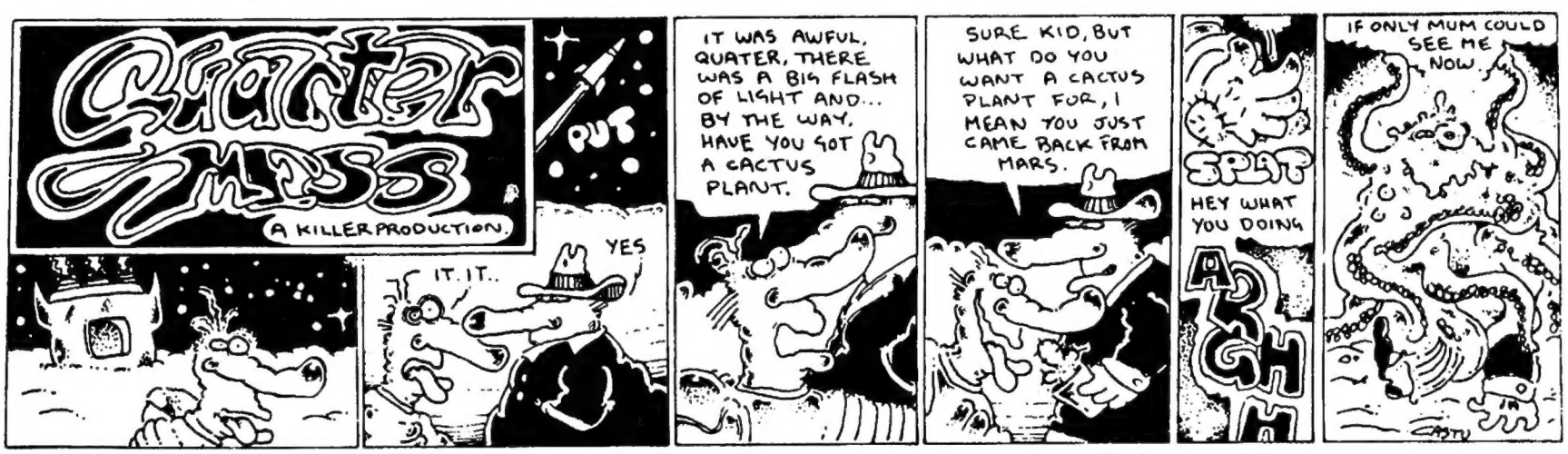
Am I saying that Spider-Man was created as some sort of subliminal identity symbol for Gays? No, not at all. It is just that that's what he was to me, because that is what I so desperately needed. Fifteen years ago, individuality wasn't strictly admired. "Conform to the status quo" was a banner that hadn't yet been torn down and revealed as the mockery of humanity that it was.

Maybe you think I'm stretching things to look at Spider-Man like this, but stop and think. Wasn't Peter Parker supposed to be more like an average high school kid with problems and hang-ups? He had *general* kinds of problems, which could easily be identified with. What made them different is that they were personal problems. Realistic problems. We were *meant* to see ourselves in him -- and some of us saw more than others.

I understood what he felt. I understood his deep personal struggles and heartaches, because I was living them; as he lived through his stuggles, he helped me to live through mine. The things he said and felt could apply to so much! Take this line from No. 33 (the context doesn't matter, as you'll see): "A man *may lose*! A man may be defeated! It's no disgrace -- so long as he doesn't *give up*!

Ditko understood that Spider-Man had words to live by. Spider-Man showed that you should have a will to fight, even in the face of overwhelming odds. I needed that. Spider-Man lived with his problems, accepted them, and learned how to deal with them. He was alone with his secret pain. An outcast from "normal" society. He couldn't fit in, and so he learned to live with it, and found out it wasn't so bad after all. He had a lot of things go wrong, but every once in a while things went right, and it was that much more meaningful.

Growing up Gay wasn't easy, but Steve Ditko's Spider-Man gave me a key to understanding myself and what I was up against, which I wouldn't have got anywhere else. Ditko's Spider-Man fought against the problems which were no fault of his own (he didn't *ask* to be Spider-Man, any more than I asked to be Gay). Ditko may have reached a level he never intended to reach -- but we still understood each other. And isn't that what really matters?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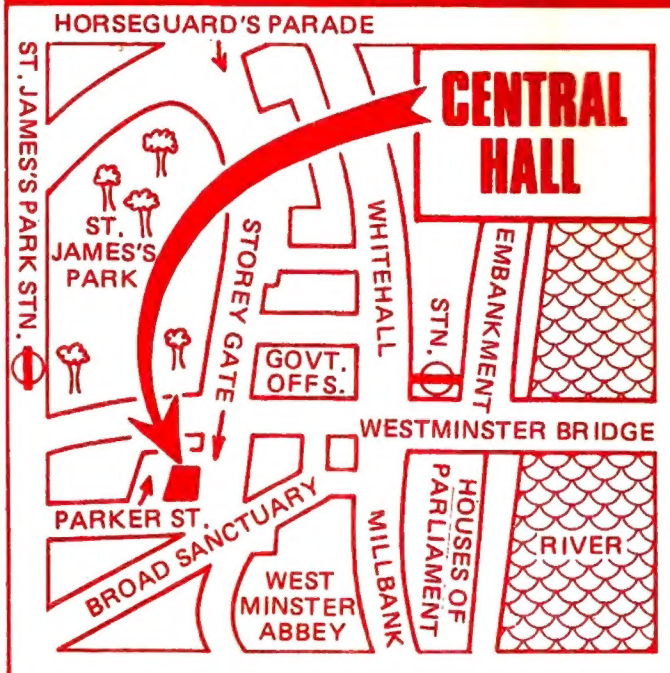

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